

Don't forget to read and review! All reviews welcome!

Disclaimer: I don't own anything in Harry Potter except for Hikosu.

Harry Potter: It Begins

Prologue

Today was a birthday. It wasn't any ordinary birthday, oh no. Today, the birthday was a sad one. Why? Because today was the day that people died. Not just one...not two...but dozens of people died.

And on this day a home was destroyed, but two small children were left alive. Those two children were perhaps the most important children of their time. They weren't normal, either. The male was the child of a prominent magical family. Magic, you say? Yes, magic does, indeed, exist. It might not be as obvious as it is to other people, but it is still out there.

The little girl was born from a world of an even deeper world of magic. This part of magic came from the Earth itself. It came from the days of old, but this also meant that she had no true parents. She had no true siblings except for those who were born from the Earth as well. She was born from pure magic...and she was to inherit a gift that only went to those of the purist of magical blood.

The two young children were but a year old. The male child was a day older than the female. They looked normal, but they had twin scars upon their foreheads. What did their scars look like? Well, they were in the shape of lightning bolts.

Neither of the two young children was particularly happy about the situation. The house around them was covered in rubble and the people outside were screaming. A cloaked figure suddenly entered the house via the window, rushing towards the two crying children. The figure looked down at them, smiling as the little girl stopped her crying. She peered up at the figure with sparkling grey eyes – it was as if she were questioning the figure who was standing over her. She trusted the figure.

"My dears, it's alright. Don't cry, now..." the cloaked figure cooed, picking up the girl. A crash from outside alerted the cloaked figure that someone was trying to enter the house. The figure needed to

leave now...with the girl child if it were possible. The figure needed to bestow upon her the Great Gift of all pure magic users. It was time, but only if the figure were to leave now.

"My darling boy I can't stay long. I must take your soul mate for a short while." The cloaked figure said apologetically. She kissed the boy's head before she turned to the baby girl in her arms.

"My dear girl. I bestow upon you the gift of the Animalia. You can now speak to all animals." The figure said, kissing the forehead of the female child. Her scar glowed for a few seconds before the baby's eyes flashed. Another crash sounded again and she was forced to abandon the male child in his crib. He screamed and cried in rage, wanting the small female child near him once again.

The cloaked figure's hood flew back, revealing the face of a beautiful woman. She shared the same grey eyes as the baby.

"Don't worry, cousin, I shall save you. We aren't even really related...but you are one of us. One of the Animalia." She whispered as she hopped out of the window, riding on the back of a great black jaguar.

The door of the room crashed open, revealing three men. One was a dark haired male with scraggly black hair. Another had dark hair as well, but it looked like it was extremely greasy despite having no grease in it whatsoever. The last had sandy hair, but he looked much older than he really was since it possessed streaks of grey.

"Oh Merlin, Lily!" the male with the greased hair exclaimed as he rushed to her fallen form. He gathered her in his arms and checked her pulse, setting her down once again with an expression of pain on his face when he realized that she was not among the living once again.

"Harry!" the sandy haired male exclaimed, rushing over to the crib and checking over the infant inside for wounds.

"Where is Hikosu? Don't tell me she's dead as well?" the form of the dark haired male exclaimed as tears ran down his cheeks. He looked wildly around the room as he ran to pick up his godson. His goddaughter was missing and she was feared dead. His best friend

was gone, there was a massive amount of blood on the floor, and his best friend's wife was on the floor of the room, dead.

Things were not going well on this birthday.

"Sirius, we can't jump to conclusions." The sandy haired male said, patting the scraggly haired male on the shoulder. The one named Sirius Black was trying to calm the crying baby boy, but he wouldn't be calmed without the girl. They had learned that a long time ago, when she had appeared on the greasy haired male's doorstep looking like she had just been born.

"I don't want to believe it, but then where is she?" Sirius exclaimed, rocking the little form of the male baby.

"Now, Sirius, you're scaring the child. Harry won't be calm until we can find Hikosu." The greasy haired male murmured, looking around the room. He could find nothing except for the dead body of Lily Potter, his dead love.

"Shove off, Severus." He retorted angrily as he carried Harry down the stairs. The sandy haired man, also known as Remus Lupin, followed him down the stairs as the one known as Severus stayed behind in the room. He had adopted the small child when he found her on his porch. Now, it just felt weird that she was gone. It had been less than a year, but he became...dare he say it? Severus Snape became softer.

Although he had always hated the Potters, Harry's family, and the Blacks...not to mention the Lupin werewolf...he had always loved Lily. When Lily found out he was taking care of a child she had demanded to see the delightful girl.

Their children met...and the rest was history. Harry refused to do anything without little Hikosu by his side. It was like the two of them were meant to be. They were soul mates...but then things like this had to happen...

Severus bent down as he saw something shiny on the ground. He bent down and realized that it was half of a locket he had gotten her. Her little picture was inside it. The other half she must still be wearing. The other half of the necklace had a picture of him in it.

The dark haired male's eyes watered up as he grasped the half of the locket in his fist. He took a shuddering breath as people began showing up outside.

"I swear to you, my little daughter, my Hikosu. On my life...I will find you. And when I do I will never let you leave my sight again."

Disclaimer: Almost everything in this chapter belongs to JK Rowling. I did say that it would be exactly like Harry Potter, but with a twist. Now, Hikosu, Arista, and Cael belong to me.

Don't worry - the future chapters might sound the same (like the book with a few tweaks) but my original plotline will start to take effect and it won't sound so much the same anymore.

Thanks to:

StarSteller - I'm glad you like my writing style, but, as I said before, I tried to make sure my character wasn't much of a mary-sue. She has a fatal flaw, but she's not whiny or anything like that.

Raine44354 - I know, I thought of that right after I put it in there XD Snape'll have a fit when he realizes it is her at Hogwarts.

00cats10 - Well, here is your 'more'! =D

... - Yeah, not necessarily. Have you read Twilight? The Imprinting is sort of like what's going on here, except with magic and bonding (transformers) and stuff like that.

Once again, I don't own Harry Potter!

## Chapter One

### The Children Who Lived

Mr. and Mrs. Dursley, of number four, Privet Drive, were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much. Just to let you know that they were, and still kind of are, snooty people. They were the last people you'd expect to be involved in anything strange or mysterious, because they just didn't hold with such nonsense. But, perhaps it was just that one small detail that drew people to them. Perhaps it was because they were the last place you would think of that something abnormal would happen there. Just a thought.

Of course, the Dursleys didn't possess this kind of thinking so they didn't really realize that something strange and abnormal was just around the corner. Oh, no...and they would be surprised.

Mr. Dursley was the director of a firm called Grunnings, which made drills. Who, boy. Making drills was the best job in the world! Whoa, note the sarcasm people. Really.

Now, Mr. Dursley...he was a big, beefy man with hardly any neck, although he did have a very large mustache. Would remind anyone of a walrus. Including that peculiar shade of purple that his face would get whenever he got flustered!

Mrs. Dursley was thin and blond and had nearly twice the usual amount of neck, which came in very useful as she spent so much of her time craning over garden fences, spying on the neighbors. Now she was a woman who reminded people of a horse. She even had the large front teeth to go with it. It's too bad that she was named after a flower instead of a breed of horse. Now that would get people laughing.

The Dursleys had a small son called Dudley and in their opinion there was no finer boy anywhere. Mrs. Dursley was also hoping to have a girl someday, but the doctor told Mrs. Dursley that she wouldn't be able to have any more children. She was so disappointed, but her husband promised her that they would someday adopt a girl in the near future.

The Dursleys had everything they wanted at the time, but they also had a secret, and their greatest fear was that somebody would discover it. Their secret wasn't exactly a bad secret, like most people would think, but it was quite embarrassing to the 'perfect family'.

In fact they didn't think they could bear it if anyone found out about the Potters. Mrs. Potter was Mrs. Dursley's sister, but they hadn't met for several years; in fact, Mrs. Dursley pretended she didn't have a sister, because her sister and her good-for-nothing husband were as unDursleyish as it was possible to be. It was like they were totally ignored because they weren't perfect...and because of the fact that they practiced magic.

The Dursleys shuddered to think what the neighbors would say if the Potters arrived in the street. The Dursleys knew that the Potters had a small son, too, but they had never even seen him. This boy was another good reason for keeping the Potters away; they didn't want

Dudley mixing with a child like that. A child that would grow up inheriting his parents' powers.

Now, When Mr. and Mrs. Dursley woke up on the dull, gray Tuesday our story starts...or was it a Wednesday? Or a Monday? No...at least I think it was a Tuesday...yeah, it was a Tuesday, please forgive me. On with the story! There was nothing about the cloudy sky outside on that gloomy day that would suggest that the oh so frowned upon strange and mysterious things would soon be happening all over the country. Mr. Dursley hummed as he picked out his most boring tie for work – grey – and Mrs. Dursley gossiped away happily as she wrestled a screaming Dudley into his high chair. I mean, who names their child 'Dudley' of all things?

None of them notice a large, tawny owl flutter past the window...or a small silver fox slink underneath the window's flower boxes.

At half past eight, Mr. Dursley picked up his briefcase, pecked his wife on the cheek, and tried to kiss Dudley goodbye, but missed because the fat little boy was now having a tantrum and throwing his cereal at the walls. Really, I was surprised that he was eating cereal, too. I'd have thought he'd still be on baby food...not that I'm saying he's stupid...ok yea, I'm saying that he's an idiot.

"Little tyke," chortled Mr. Dursley as he left his house. He got into his car and backed out of number four's drive...thank god for that.

It was on the corner of the street that he noticed the first sign of something peculiar – a cat reading a map. For a second Mr. Dursley didn't realize what he had seen – then he jerked his head around to look again. There was a beautiful tabby cat standing on the corner of Privet Drive, but there wasn't a map in sight. Man, was he going crazy or what?

What in the bloody hell could he have been thinking of? He shook his head, positive that it must have been a trick of the light. Mr. Dursley blinked and stared at the cat. It stared back. Maybe Mr. Dursley was going insane? Perhaps that was it...

As Mr. Dursley drove around the corner and up the road, he watched the cat in his mirror. It was now reading the sign that said Privet Drive – no, looking at the sign that said Privet Drive. It was impossible. Cats couldn't read maps or signs, but then why was that

much larger cat joining it? It looked...blimey; it looked like a lion cub! The beefy man shook his head again, but when he looked back only the tabby cat was there. Mr. Dursley gave himself a shake and put the cats out of his mind. As he drove towards town he thought of nothing except a large order of drills he was hoping to get that day.

But on the edge of town, drills were driven out of his mind by something else. As he sat in the usual morning traffic jam, he couldn't help noticing that there seemed to be a lot of strangely dressed people about. People in cloaks...and the odd person dressed in a strange style of tunic and pants with a sash around the tunic. Mr. Dursley couldn't bear people who dressed in funny clothes – the getups you saw on young people! The ones in tunics seemed to be foreign...but they could at least dress in clothing appropriate for the country they were visiting!

He supposed that this was some stupid new fashion. He drummed his fingers on the steering wheel and his eyes fell on a huddle of these weirdoes standing quite close by. They were whispering excitedly together. Mr. Dursley was enraged to see that a couple of them weren't young at all. Why, that man had to be older than he was, and wearing an emerald green cloak! The nerve of him! And that one there! He looked to be quite ancient, but he was wearing some sort of undershirt, tunic, and pants with a dark sash around the tunic like a belt! He should know better!

But then it struck Mr. Dursley that this was probably some silly stunt – these people were obviously collecting for something...yes, that would be it. The traffic moved on and a few minutes later, Mr. Dursley arrived in the Grunnings parking lot, his mind back on drills.

Once he got to his incredibly mundane job, Mr. Dursley always sat with his back to the window in his office...on the ninth floor. Man, it can't even be an even number. If he hadn't sat with his back towards the window, he might have found it harder to concentrate on drills that morning. The obese man didn't see the owls – yes owls – swooping past in broad daylight, though people down in the street did.

Oh, how they pointed and gazed open mouthed as owl after owl sped overhead. Most of them had never seen an owl even at nighttime...but none of them ever noticed the other animals that were in a frenzy.



Dursley, however, had a perfectly normal, owl-free morning. He yelled at five different people, how rude of him, and made several important phone calls...and shouted a bit more. He was in a very good mood until lunchtime, when he thought he'd stretch his legs and walk across the road to buy himself a bun from the bakery.

He'd forgotten all about the people in cloaks, and the foreigners, until he passed a group of them next to the baker's. He eyed them angrily as he passed. He didn't know why, but they made him uneasy. The foreigners even looked like they had animal markings! A few had slitted eyes or a couple even had fangs! Some of them had this strange marking, but Mr. Dursley couldn't tell what it was. The bunch he passed were whispering excitedly, too, and he couldn't see a single collecting tin. It was on his way back past them, clutching a large doughnut in a bag, that he caught a few words of what they were saying.

"The Potters, that's right, that's what I heard –"

"-yes, their son, Harry –"

"Don't forget about Severus Snape's daughter –"

"Oh, yes...little Hikosu, right?"

"I heard she was taken –"

"Kidnapped –"

"Maybe Killed..."

"Poor little Harry –"

Mr. Dursley stopped dead. Fear flooded him. It was that name. He looked back at the whisperers as if he wanted to say something to them, but thought better of it.

He dashed back across the road, hurried up to his office, snapped at his secretary not to disturb him, seized his telephone, and had almost finished dialing his home number when he changed his mind. In that order. He put the receiver back down and stroked the stolen

walrus hair on his face, thinking...no, he was being stupid. As always.

Potter wasn't such an unusual name – especially if you potted things! – and he was sure there were lots of people called Potter who had a son called Harry. He had no idea who this Hikosu person was, but Harry was familiar. Come to think of it, he wasn't even sure his nephew was called Harry. He'd never even seen the boy. It might have been Harvey. Or Harold. Or Bartholomew. There was no point in worrying his wife; she always got so upset at any mention of her sister. He didn't blame her – if he'd had a sister like that...but all the same, those people in cloaks and the foreigners...

He found it a lot harder to concentrate on drills that afternoon and when he left the building at five o'clock, he was still so worried that he walked straight into someone just outside the door.

"Sorry," he grunted, being the big and beefy man that he was, as the tiny old man stumbled and almost fell. It was a few seconds before Mr. Dursley realized that the man was wearing a violet cloak. His 'freak radar' went into overdrive while the man didn't seem at all upset at being almost knocked to the ground. On the contrary! His face split into a wide smile and he said in a squeaky voice that made passerby stare,

"Don't be sorry, my dear sir, for nothing could upset me today! Let us rejoice for You-Know-Who has gone at last! Even Muggles like yourself should be celebrating this happy, happy day!"

And the old man hugged Mr. Dursley around the middle and walked off. Just like that. And he was gone...and out of sight...

Mr. Dursley stood rooted to the spot. He had been hugged by a complete stranger. He also thought he had been called a 'Muggle'...whatever that was – odd word by the way. He was rattled. He was startled. He was downright annoyed. He hurried to his car and set off for home, hoping that he was imagining things, which he had never hoped before, because he didn't approve of imagination. It was for the 'little people'.

As he pulled into the driveway of number four, the first thing he saw – and it didn't improve his mood – was the tabby cat he'd spotted that morning. It was now sitting on his garden wall...and what was

worse...there was a great bird sitting next to it. It was enormous! He was sure that the tabby was the same one; it had the same markings around its eyes.

"Shoo!" said Mr. Dursley loudly, a bead of sweat dripping down his massive face. Neither the cat or the great bird paid him no mind. The cat just gave him a stern look and the bird ignored him altogether. Was this normal behavior? Mr. Dursley had to wonder. Trying to pull himself together, he let himself into the house. He was still determined not to mention anything to his wife.

Mrs. Dursley, despite being the abnormally nosey person that she was, had a nice, normal day. She told him over dinner about Mrs. Next Door's problems with her daughter and how Dudley, the fat lard-boy, had learned a new word ("Won't!" – brilliant isn't he?). Mrs. Dursley tried to act normally. When Dudley had been put to bed, he went into the living room in time to catch the last report on the evening news:

"And finally, bird-watchers everywhere have reported that the nation's owls have been behaving very unusually today. Although owls normally hunt at night and are hardly ever seen in daylight, there have been hundreds of sightings of these birds flying in every direction since sunrise. Experts are unable to explain why the owls have suddenly changed their sleeping patterns. The owls are not only the odd animal acting unusual today. There have been sightings of hawks, eagles, wolves, and the odd wild cat around town today. Although they didn't approach any people, authorities are still weary." The newscaster allowed himself a grin.

"Most mysterious. And now, over to Jim McGuffin with the weather. Going to be any more showers of owls and sightings of the odd animal tonight, Jim?" the newscaster asked, still grinning.

"Well, Ted," said the weatherman, "I don't know about that, but it's not only the owls that have been acting oddly today. Viewers as far apart as Kent, Yorkshire, and Dundee have been phoning in to tell me that instead of the rain I promised yesterday they've had a downpour of shooting stars and flower petals! Perhaps people have been celebrating Bonfire Night early – it's not until next week, folks! But I can promise a wet night tonight." The weatherman continued with a chuckle.

Mr. Dursley sat frozen in his armchair. Shooting stars and raining flower petals all over Britain? Owls flying by daylight? Mysterious people in cloaks and those freaky foreigners all over the place? And a whisper, a whisper about the Potters...and someone named Severus Snape and his daughter, Hikosu...

Mrs. Dursley came into the living room carrying two cups of tea. It was no good...tea couldn't calm his frazzled nerves. He'd have to say something – anything – to her. He cleared his throat nervously.

"Er – Petunia, dear – you haven't heard from your sister lately, have you? Or one of her beastly friends?"

As he expected, Mrs. Dursley looked shocked and angry. After all, they normally pretended she didn't have a sister. She was known as the One-Who-Did-Not-Exist, after all.

"No," she replied sharply with a glare. "Why?"

"Funny stuff on the news...shooting stars and raining flower petals...hah." Mr. Dursley mumbled. "Owls in daylight...and there were a lot of funny-looking people in town today."

"So?" the blond woman snapped.

"Well, I just thought...maybe...perhaps...it was something to do with...you know...her crowd."

Mrs. Dursley sipped her tea through pursed lips. You could tell that she was getting annoyed by the conversation. Mr. Dursley wondered whether he dared tell her he'd heard the name "Potter" or that of the other odd family name. He decided he didn't dare. Instead he said, as casually as he could,

"Their son...he'd be about Dudley's age now, wouldn't he?"

"I suppose so," said Mrs. Dursley stiffly as if she didn't want to think about it.

"What's his name again? Howard, isn't it?"

"Harry. Nasty, common name, if you ask me."

"And he had a little friend that was a girl? The one he was 'betrothed' to?"

"Yes. Good idea if you ask me. He won't marry one of the normal people then. I believe her name was...what was it?"

"Hikosu?"

"Yes, that was it. It was actually a pretty name...for one of them." she spat.

"Oh, yes." Said Mr. Dursley, his heart sinking horribly. "Yes, I quite agree."

He didn't say another word on the subject as they went upstairs to bed. While Mrs. Dursley was in the bathroom, Mr. Dursley crept to the bedroom window and peered down into the front garden. The cat was still there, but this time there was a great white wolf sitting next to it. They were staring down Privet Drive as though they were waiting for something.

Was he imagining things? Could all this have anything to do with the Potters and that other family? If it did...if it got out that they were related to a pair of – well, he didn't think he could bear it.

The Dursleys got into bed. Mrs. Dursley fell asleep quickly, but Mr. Dursley lay awake, turning it all over in his mind. His last, comforting thought before he fell asleep was that even if the Potters were involved, there was no reason for them to come near him and Mrs. Dursley. The Potters knew very well what he and Petunia thought about them and their kind...He couldn't see how he and Petunia could get mixed up in anything that might be going on – he yawned and turned over – it couldn't affect them...

How very wrong he was.

Mr. Dursley might have been drifting into an uneasy sleep, but the cat on the wall and the wolf beside her were showing no signs of sleepiness. They were sitting as still as a statue with their eyes fixed unblinkingly on the far corner of Privet Drive. The two of them didn't so much as quiver when a car door slammed on the next street, nor when two owls swooped overhead. In fact, it was nearly midnight when the two of the animals moved at all.

A man appeared on the corner the cat and wolf had been watching, appearing so suddenly and silently you'd have thought he'd just popped out of the ground. The cat's tail twitched and its eyes narrowed. The wolf bowed its head and growled in greeting.

Nothing like this man had ever been seen on Privet Drive. He was tall, thin, and very old, judging from the silver of his hair and beard, which were both long enough to tuck into his belt. He was wearing long robes, a purple cloak that swept the ground, and high-heeled, buckled boots. His blue eyes were light, bright, and sparkling behind half-moon spectacles and his nose was very long and crooked, as though it had been broken at least twice. This man's name...was Albus Dumbledore.

Albus Dumbledore didn't seem to realize he had just arrived in a street where everything from his name to his boots was unwelcome. He was busy rummaging in his cloak, looking for something. But he did seem to realize he was being watched, because he looked up suddenly at the cat and wolf, which were still staring at him from the other end of the street. For some reason, the sight of the cat and wolf seemed to amuse him. He chuckled and muttered, "I should have known."

He found what he was looking for in his inside pocket. It seemed to be a silver cigarette lighter. He flicked it open, held it up in the air, and clicked it. The nearest street lamp went out with a little pop. He clicked it again – the next lamp flickered into darkness. Twelve times he clicked the Put-Outer, until the only lights left on the whole street were four tiny pinpricks in the distance, which were the eyes of the cat and the wolf watching him.

If anyone looked out their window now, even beady-eyed Mrs. Dursley, they wouldn't be able to see anything that was happening down on the pavement. Dumbledore slipped the Put-Outer back inside his cloak and set off down the street toward number four, where he sat down on the wall next to the cat. He didn't look at it, but after a moment he spoke to it.

"Fancy seeing you here, Professor McGonagall."

He turned to smile at the tabby, but it had gone. Instead he was smiling at a rather severe-looking woman who was wearing square

glasses exactly the shape of the markings the cat had around her eyes. she, too, was wearing a cloak, an emerald one. Her black hair was drawn into a tight bun. She looked distinctly ruffled.

"How did you know it was me?" she asked.

"My dear Professor. I've never seen a cat sit so stiffly."

"That is true, Milady. To blend in, you must learn the ways of the animals." A new, wise voice cut in. The two magic users turned in surprise as the wolf previously sitting next to the wall shifted into a humanoid. The only things that suggested he wasn't fully human were that he had unnaturally bright eyes, fangs, and white wolf ears. He also had a bushy wolf tail that was wagging back and forth. His hair was black and reached the middle of his back, and he wore the clothing of those 'foreigners' that Mr. Dursley had seen in town.

"I apologize for the intrusion, but I am one of Lady Hikosu's animal guides. Each Animalia has at least one. I am only able to stay in this form for a short amount of time, but I came deliver a message." The animal guide said, sitting down upon the wall that the female Professor was previously sitting upon. Both the female Professor and Dumbledore nodded their heads to show that they were listening.

"My Lady shall arrive soon. She shall live here, with the Dursleys, and at the age of thirteen she shall Imprint on her soul mate, which is Harry. Then, she will choose her new name that the world will forever know her by. All Animalia do and their soul mates imprint back exactly one year later. The love of an Animalia is hard to come by." He said, explaining the beginning of his message.

"Lady Hikosu, however, is a special case. Young Harry seems to have already Imprinted on her – as Anamalia soul mates normally do. I would like to have her live with her appointed guardian, the one chosen by the Earthen Magic..." he trailed off, obviously trying to think of the name of her Guardian.

"Severus Snape." Dumbledore supplied, eyes twinkling with mirth.

"Thank you, Milord. Severus Snape is, indeed, Lady Hikosu's chosen guardian. He is now as good as her father...however, due to a few unseen circumstances – Harry's early Imprinting and the scars

given to them by Voldemort – we feel it is best to let her live here. Although it is usual for two children of this age to form a sibling like relationship, the two of them will form a bond stronger than anything. Nothing shall come between them and when Hikosu Imprints on Harry they will...how should I say this..." the animal guide continued to explain.

"The two of them will fall in love?" Professor McGonagall supplied, smiling softly with tears welling in her eyes. Harry and Hikosu deserved this kind of happiness.

"Exactly. I must request that at age thirteen, the summer before the two of them start year three at their school, they could live with Severus Snape." The animal guide requested, eyes flashing with a knowing gleam. He knew that the Dursleys would not be a good place for them to grow into adults.

"Your request shall be granted. All I wanted was for Harry and, by extension, Hikosu to grow up without the fame tainting their minds." The wizened old male agreed, nodding his head. Without a word the animal guide smiled, bowing low as he backed up.

"Before I phase back... I would like for all of this information to remain secret from everyone at the moment. Severus will find his daughter at the school, but tell him that she is here just in case he wishes to see her at any time. She is to remain here – the Earthen Magic has spoken. Oh...and my name is Cael." The animal guardian whispered just seconds before he phased back into his white wolf form once again. He shook his head, lying down at Dumbledore's feet.

"Thank you for the information, Cael. Now, my dear Professor, was my hearing correct? Did you say that you were here all day? When you could have been celebrating? I must have passed at least a dozen feasts and parties on my way here."

Professor McGonagall sniffed angrily.

"Oh yes, everyone's celebrating, all right." She said impatiently.

"You'd think they'd be a bit more careful, but no – even the Muggles have noticed something's going on. It was on their news." She jerked her head back at the Dursleys' dark living-room window.



"I heard it. Flock of owls...shooting stars...raining flower petals...well, they're not completely stupid. They were bound to notice something. Shooting stars down in Kent – I'll bet that was Dedalus Diggle. And raining flower petals! Probably Amos Diggory...he was always a bit on the girlish side...or the work of the Earthen Magic." She scoffed in disdain.

"You can't blame them." said Dumbledore gently. "We've had precious little to celebrate for eleven years."

"I know that." Said Professor McGonagall irritably. "But that's no reason to lose our heads. People are being downright careless, out on the streets in broad daylight, not even dressed in Muggle clothes, swapping rumors. And the Animalia, with their animal guides, are roaming in the city as well! I thought that since there were very few of them left they would have enough sense to be careful!" she threw a sharp, sideways glance at Dumbledore here, as though hoping he was going to tell her something, but he didn't, so she went on.

"A fine thing it would be if, on the very day You-Know-Who seems to have disappeared at last, the Muggles found out about us all. I suppose he really has gone, Dumbledore?"

"It certainly seems so," said Dumbledore. "We have much to be thankful for. Would you care for a lemon drop?"

"A what?"

"A lemon drop. They're a kind of Muggle sweet I'm rather fond of."

"No, thank you." Said Professor McGonagall coldly, as though she didn't think this was the moment for lemon drops. "As I say, even if You-Know-Who has gone –"

"My dear Professor, surely a sensible person like yourself can call him by his name? All this 'You-Know-Who' nonsense – for eleven years I have been trying to persuade people to call him by his proper name: Voldemort." Professor McGonagall flinched, but Dumbledore, who was unsticking two lemon drops, seemed not to notice.

"It all gets so confusing if we keep saying 'You-Know-Who.' I have never seen any reason to be frightened of saying Voldemort's name."

"I know you haven't," said Professor McGonagall, sounding half exasperated, half admitting. She looked ready to tear her hair out, but she refrained from doing so.

"But you're different. Everyone knows you're the only You-Know- oh, all right, Voldemort, was frightened of."

"You flatter me," said Dumbledore calmly. "Voldemort had powers I will never have."

"Only because you're too – well – noble to use them."

"It's lucky it's dark. I haven't blushed so much since Madam Pomfrey told me she liked my new earmuffs." Professor McGonagall shot a sharp look at Dumbledore and said, "The owls are nothing next to the rumors that are flying around. You know what everyone's saying? About why he's disappeared? About what finally stopped him?"

It seemed that Professor McGonagall had reached the point she was most anxious to discuss, the real reason she had been waiting on a cold, hard wall all day next to a strange white wolf. Neither as a cat nor a woman had she fixed Dumbledore with such a piercing stare as she did now. It was plain that whatever 'everyone' was saying she was not going to believe it until Dumbledore told her it was true. Dumbledore, however, was choosing another lemon drop and did not answer.

"What they're saying," she pressed on, "is that last night Voldemort turned up in Godric's Hollow. He went to find the Potters. The rumor is that Lily and James Potter are – are – that they're – dead. And that little Hikosu is missing!"

"James Potter is not dead. He is missing. His body was not found when I arrived, Father." The melodious voice of a woman answered coming from the shadows. She stepped forward while a great jaguar followed her every movement. The jaguar started purring, however, when she spotted Cael resting next to the wall.

"Ah! My dear Arista! I was worried about you. Is she alright?" Dumbledore asked as the woman stepped forward with the bundle in her arms. The woman was younger than Professor McGonagall and had shoulder length wavy brunette hair and ice blue eyes. she was wearing black robes and a dark purple cloak. A gentle smile was on her lips and she had a distinct marking on the center of her left cheek. It was of a circle with a plus through it. By being marked with that distinct figure it meant that a person was of the Animalia. But, being gifted by being an Animalia there were also its drawbacks. The woman named Arista couldn't see out of her left eye.

"I am fine and so is little Hikosu. I had to take her to get her marking." She explained. Professor McGonagall was clueless; she had no idea who this woman was or the child she was carrying in her arms.

"And?" Dumbledore asked, eyes twinkling in excitement.

"Say hello to the magical world's newest Animalia." Arista beamed, pulling back the piece of blanket that was covering the child's face. Professor McGonagall let out a gasp as she realized that the child was little Hikosu. She looked no different than she did before except for the fact that she bore the same unique mark on the hollow of her throat. The lightning shaped scar was still on her forehead, covered by a wisp of...purple hair? It was true – the little girl's hair color changed from a dark black to a dark violet color. It was not unheard of an Animalia's hair and eye color to change when receiving the symbol, but nobody had received such an unusual color.

"Hikosu may be alright, but I'm afraid to say that Lily is dead, Professor McGonagall. We have an inkling on where James might be, but the Animalia will find him." Arista explained sadly.

"Lily...I can't believe it...I didn't want to believe it...Oh, Albus..." Dumbledore reached out and patted her on the shoulder.

"I know...I know..." he said heavily.

Professor McGonagall's voice trembled as she went on. "That's not all. They're saying that Voldemort tried to kill the Potter's son, Harry and Hikosu. But – he couldn't kill them. He couldn't kill those two children. Children! No one knows why, or how, but they're saying that when he couldn't kill the children, Voldemort's power somehow

broke – and that's why he's gone." She said, looking down at the slumbering baby girl.

Dumbledore nodded glumly, saddened by the events that had transpired.

"It's – it's true?" faltered Professor McGonagall. "After all he's done...all the people he's killed...he couldn't kill two children? It's just astounding...of all the things to stop him...but how in the name of heaven did Harry survive? Hikosu has thanks to her Animalia powers...but Harry..."

"We can only guess," said Dumbledore. "We may never know." Professor McGonagall pulled out a lace handkerchief and dabbed at her eyes beneath her spectacles. Dumbledore gave a great sniff as he took a golden watch from his pocket and examined it. It was a very odd watch. It had twelve hands but no numbers; instead, little planets were moving around the edge. It must have made sense to Dumbledore, though, because he put it back in his pocket and said, "Hagrid's late. I suppose it was he who told you I'd be here, by the way?"

"Yes," said Professor McGonagall. "And I don't suppose you're going to tell me why you're here of all places?"

"I've come to bring Harry to his aunt and uncle. They're the only family he has left now aside from his soul mate. Like Cael said: the two children will reside here until either they go to Hogwarts or they may remain here until they wish to leave. Then, they will be residing with Professor Snape, who is Hikosu's chosen guardian." He said with a smile towards little Hikosu.

"You don't mean – you can't mean the people who live here?" cried Professor McGonagall, jumping to her feet – she had sat down on the wall from the shock of seeing Hikosu – and pointing at number four.

"Dumbledore – you can't. I've been watching them all day. You couldn't find two people who are less like us. And they've got this son – I saw him kicking his mother all the way up the street, screaming for sweets. Harry Potter and Hikosu Snape come and live here!"

"Like I told Cael, it's the best place for him." Said Dumbledore firmly. "His aunt and uncle will be able to explain everything to them when they're older. I've written them a letter.

"A letter?" repeated Professor McGonagall faintly, sitting back down on the wall. "Really, Dumbledore, you think you can explain all this in a letter? These people will never understand them! They'll be famous – a legend – I would be surprised if today was known as 'Harry and Hikosu' Day in the future – there will be books written about them – every child in our world will know their names!"

"Exactly." Said Dumbledore, looking very seriously over the top of his half-moon glasses. "It would be enough to turn any child's head. Famous before they can walk and talk! Famous for something they won't even remember! Can't you see how much better off they'll be, growing up away from all that until they're ready to take it?"

Professor McGonagall opened her mouth, changed her mind, swallowed, and then said "Yes – yes, you're right, of course. But how is the boy getting here, Dumbledore? Hikosu is here, but Harry isn't." she eyed his cloak suddenly as though she thought he might be hiding Harry underneath it.

"Hagrid's bringing him."

"You think it – wise – to trust Hagrid with something as important as this?"

"I would trust Hagrid with my life," said Dumbledore.

"I'm not saying his heart isn't in the right place," said Professor McGonagall grudgingly, "but you can't pretend he's not careless. He tends to – what was that?"

A low rumbling sound had broken the silence around them. It grew steadily louder as they looked up and down the street for some sign of a headlight; it swelled to a roar as they both looked up at the sky – and a huge motorcycle fell out of the air and landed on the road in front of them.

If the motorcycle was huge, it was nothing to the man sitting astride it. He was almost twice as tall as a normal man and at least five times as wide. He looked simply too big to be swallowed, and so

wild – long tangles of bushy black hair and beard hid most of his face, he had hands the size of trash can lids, and his feet in their leather boots were like baby dolphins. In his vast, muscular arms he was holding a bundle of blankets.

"Hagrid," said Dumbledore, sounding relieved. "At last. And where did you get that motorcycle?"

"Borrowed it, Professor Dumbledore, sir." Said the giant, climbing carefully off the motorcycle as he spoke.

"Young Sirius Black lent it to me. I've got him, sir."

"No problems, were there?"

"No, sir – house was almost destroyed, but I got him out all right before the Muggles started swarmin' around. He fell asleep as we was flyin' over Bristol. Seemed a bit cranky come ta think o' it. Where's the other little 'un?"

"Over here, Hagrid." Arista murmured, walking over so that the two children were sleeping side by side. Dumbledore and Professor McGonagall bent forward over the bundle of blankets. Inside, just visible, was a baby boy, fast asleep. Under a tuft of jet-black hair over his forehead they could see a curiously shaped cut, like a bolt of lightning.

"Is that where - ?" whispered Professor McGonagall, looking back and forth between the two sleeping babies.

"Yes." Said Dumbledore. "They'll have those scars forever."

"Couldn't you do something about it, Dumbledore?"

"Even if I could, I wouldn't. Scars can come in handy. I have one myself above my left knee that is a perfect map of the London Underground. Well – give him here, Hagrid – we'd better get this over with." Dumbledore took Harry in his arms and turned toward the Dursley's house.

"Could I – could I say goodbye to them, sir?" asked Hagrid. He bent his great, shaggy head over the two, giving them each what must

have been a very scratchy, whiskery kiss. Then, suddenly, Hagrid let out a howl like a wounded dog.

"Shhh!" hissed Professor McGonagall, "You'll wake the Muggles!"

"S-s-sorry." Sobbed Hagrid, taking out a large, spotted handkerchief and burying his face in it. "But I c-c-can't stand it – Lily dead an' James missin' – an' poor little Harry and Hikosu off ter live with Muggles –"

"Yes, yes, it's all very sad, but get a grip on yourself, Hagrid, or we'll be found." Professor McGonagall whispered, patting Hagrid gingerly on the arm as Dumbledore and Arista stepped over the low garden wall and walked to the front door. He laid the children gently on the doorstep, took a letter out of his cloak, tucked it inside Harry's blankets, and then came back to the other two. For a full minute the three of them stood and looked at the little bundles and Arista as she bent over them.

"Be safe, you two." She whispered, smiling down at them. Harry somehow unconsciously moved closer to Hikosu in his sleep, gripping her little hand in his. Hagrid's shoulders shook, Professor McGonagall blinked furiously, and the twinkling light that usually shone from Dumbledore's eyes seemed to have gone out.

"Well," said Dumbledore finally, "that's that. We've no business staying here. We may as well go and join the celebrations."

"Yeah," said Hagrid in a very muffled voice, "I'll be takin' Sirius his bike back. G'nigt Professor McGonagall – Professor Dumbledore, sir – Ma'am." Wiping his streaming eyes on his jacket sleeve, Hagrid swung himself onto the motorcycle and kicked the engine into life; with a roar it rose into the air and off into the night.

"I shall see you soon, I expect, Professor McGonagall." Said Dumbledore, nodding to her. Professor McGonagall blew her nose in reply. Dumbledore turned and walked back down the street. On the corner he stopped and took out the silver Put-Outer. He clicked it once, and twelve balls of light sped back to their street lamps so that Privet Drive glowed suddenly orange and he could make out a tabby cat slinking around the corner at the other end of the street. He could just see the bundles of blankets on the step of number four.

"Good luck, Harry...Hikosu." He murmured. He turned on his heel and with a swish of his cloak he was gone.

A breeze ruffled the neat hedges of Privet Drive, which lay silent and tidy under the inky sky, the very last place you would expect astonishing things to happen. Harry Potter rolled over, facing his soul mate without waking up. One small hand was still closed around hers. A necklace was gently wrapped around her neck, the broken half of the locket holding a picture of a man. Cael concentrated, becoming so that he looked like a normal dog. He was still a wolf, but he held a sort of glamour that Muggles couldn't see through.

The two children slept on, not knowing that they were special, not knowing they were famous, not knowing that they would be woken in a few hours' time by Mrs. Dursley's scream as she opened the front door to put out the milk bottles, nor that they would spend the next few weeks being prodded and pinched by his cousin Dudley...they couldn't know that at his very moment, people meeting in secret all over the country were holding up their glasses and saying in hushed voices:

"To Harry Potter and Hikosu Snape – the children who lived!"



Disclaimer: Anything recognizable goes to JK Rowling - I do, however, own Hikosu, Cael (the white wolf), and Arista.

Thanks to:

Elizabeth Lullaby - I thought about it and really didn't realize that when I was making OCs for my fanfictions. I kinda used a name generator, but I changed it in the first chapter so that she has to pick her own name when she reaches the Animalia version of 'courting age'.

Raine44354 - lol! Really? I don't have internet on my phone so I wouldn't know. Sorry =D Glad you like it, though.

TwilightEclps - I try to think of things that are different from the norm. Glad you like it!

## Chapter Two

### Outing to the Zoo

Nearly ten years had passed since the Dursleys had woken up to find their nephew and his soul mate on the front step, but Privet Drive had hardly changed at all. The sun rose on the same tidy front gardens and lit up the brass number four on the Dursley's front door; it crept into their living room, which was almost exactly the same as it had been on the night when Mr. Dursley had seen that fateful news report about the owls. Only the photographs on the mantelpiece really showed how much time had passed.

Ten years ago, there had been lots of pictures of what looked like a large pink beach ball wearing different-colored bonnets, even pink mind you! – but Dudley Dursley was no longer a baby, and now the photographs showed a large blond boy riding his first bicycle, on a carousel at the fair, playing a computer game with his father, being hugged and kissed by his mother...the poor mama's boy. The room held no sign at all that another boy lived in the house, too.

There were a few scattered pictures of a little girl, though. Remember how I told you that Mrs. Dursley wanted a baby girl, but could no longer have children of her own? Yes, that's right. Mrs. Dursley sort of...adopted Hikosu as her own...although she made the dear change her name. In private they still called her Hikosu, but

in public they called her this horrid name. Dorothea. That's what they renamed her.

Poor Hikosu originally had a deep violet head of pin straight hair that fell to her bum – Mr. Dursley wouldn't spend the money for her to get a decent haircut so Mrs. Dursley was forced to trim as little as possible so she wouldn't look ratty. Her beautiful hair was dyed a dull brown color. It was so she wouldn't stand out. She was also forced to wear high collared shirts or thick ribbons around her neck to cover up the mark on her neck. She couldn't – or rather the Dursleys couldn't be seen as different.

Her one final flaw, which actually made Mr. Dursley very happy, was the fact that she couldn't speak. Hikosu was a mute. No matter what she did she couldn't utter a noise and because so they usually tied a bell to her wrist.

The only thing they couldn't change - or Mr. Dursley refused to actually pay for colored contacts the cheap ass that he was - was the fact that her stormy grey eyes changed to a molten silver color when she was experiencing intense emotions.

Of course, Mrs. Dursley was the only one who was civil enough towards her. Mr. Dursley looked like he wanted nothing more than to kick her out of the house at times, but Harry would have none of it. It was his only condition for not telling the police about their living conditions.

Yes, Harry Potter was still there, asleep at the moment, but not for long. His Aunt Petunia was awake and it was her shrill voice that made the first noise of the day.

"Up! Get up! Now!"

Harry woke with a start. His aunt rapped on the door again.

"Up! And get Dorothea up while you're at it!" she screeched. Harry heard her walking toward the kitchen and then the sound of the frying pan being put on the stove. He rolled onto his back and tried to remember the dream he had been having. It had been a good one. There had been a flying motorcycle in it...and Hikosu was there with him. He had a funny feeling he'd had the same dream before.

"Her name is Hikosu." He mumbled to himself just to spite his aunt. He knew that the natural violet haired girl despised the name 'Dorothea', but there was nothing either of them could do about it.

The two of them were closer than ever. True to what the Earthen Magic predicted the two of them had formed a very strong bond. They weren't like siblings – they were closer than siblings. Harry stood up for her when Dudley would complain. He could read her better than he could a book, but then again she could read him the same way. She often tended to his wounds when Dudley would beat him up.

Then...there was this odd spectacle that started developing in the past year. It was odd, and at times a bit scary, but the stormy grey eyed girl could literally speak to Harry by sending messages into his mind. Harry looked up information about it whenever he could and found out that it was called telepathy, but for some reason he couldn't talk back to her. He was the only one who could hear her, but he didn't mind. It was...nice. To communicate with everyone else she carried around a thick notebook that she wrote in. Well, either that or she slowly mouthed the words.

Like the cheap ass that he was, Mr. Dursley refused to pay for sign language lessons. Said that they were too expensive and that he could get notebooks and pencils at the store for cheap.

Unfortunately, Harry was broken out of his thoughts once again. His aunt was back outside the door.

"Are you up yet?" she demanded.

"Nearly," said Harry.

"Well, get a move on, I want you to look after the bacon after you get Dorothea up. And don't you dare let it burn. I want everything perfect on Duddy's birthday."

Harry groaned.

"What did you say?" his aunt snapped through the door.

"Nothing, nothing..."

Dudley's birthday – how could he have forgotten? Harry got slowly out of bed and started looking for socks. He found a pair under his bed and, after pulling a spider off one of them, put them on. Harry was used to spiders, because the cupboard under the stairs was full of them, and that was where he slept. When he was dressed he went down the hall and into the kitchen. He slipped through the back door and out to the tiny shed that used to house the gardening tools. Now, Hikosu slept there. He felt sorry for her – the gardening shed was smaller than his cupboard.

He lightly rapped on the door, pressing his ear against it to see if he could hear the bell on her wrist. He heard nothing so he unlatched the door – Mr. Dursley locked her in at night – and slowly opened it, smiling softly as he watched the sleeping girl. He stood there for a few moments, but he was harshly knocked out of his reverie when his Aunt Petunia opened the door to yell at him.

"Well get a move on, then!" she shouted, slamming the door closed.

Harry sighed, creeping into the shed on his hands and knees. It had a low roof so he couldn't fully stand in it. When he managed to make it to her side, he gently nudged her shoulder.

"Hikosu, wake up." He whispered, smiling again as her eyelids fluttered open.

What do you want, Harry? She asked him, voice faint in his mind. He knew that she was still half asleep as he pushed her hair back and away from her face. The ribbon that was around her neck was still tied tightly – it was almost pressing into her skin as if it were to rub the mark on her throat away. Mrs. Dursley had seen that it wouldn't come off.

"Hikosu, it's Dudley's birthday. We forgot and you have to get dressed, now, or Aunt Petunia will get angry." Harry said, smirking when he remembered what was in store for the stormy grey eyed girl.

Hikosu's eyes snapped open and faded into a bright silver color. She looked towards Harry with a panicked look on her face.

What? Harry, how could we forget! Now I have to...to...aah! I have to wear one of those frilly dresses that Petunia likes to dress me up

in! I can't stand them! She exclaimed as her mouth opened in a silent scream. Harry only snorted at the other girl's misfortune. He may have had a strong bond with her, but that didn't mean that he didn't enjoy watching as she got all dolled up.

"Well...it's better than wearing a grimy tee-shirt and Dudley's old pants, isn't it?" he joked, pointing down at himself.

True...but... - it was here that she sighed in defeat – can you at least tell me what color it is? She asked her best friend as she sat up and yawned tonelessly. She rubbed the sleep from her eyes as he pushed her hair behind her ear. She was used to these little tidbits of affection. It showed that he cared.

"Pink and white I think. Couldn't see much through the plastic bag." He replied, green eyes dancing with mirth. Every year, on Dudley's birthday, Mrs. Dursley bought Hikosu a new dress. Since everyone thought she was Mrs. Dursley's adoptive daughter and they usually went out on Dudley's birthday, the blond woman was forced to buy her a nice dress every year. Usually it turned out very horribly.

Alright, I'm up. I'll see you in a bit. Hikosu said, sending a smile in Harry's direction as she got to her knees. She was wearing a pair of cotton shorts and a tank top – Mrs. Dursley would most likely make her go upstairs without breakfast in order for her to change.

Harry smiled back and got up, hurrying to the kitchen so he could take over cooking the bacon. The table was almost hidden beneath all Dudley's birthday presents. It looked as though Dudley had gotten the new computer he wanted, not to mention the second television and the racing bike. Exactly why Dudley – the porker that he was – wanted a racing bike was a mystery to Harry. Dudley was very fat and hated exercise – unless of course it involved punching somebody. Dudley's favorite punching bag was Harry since he often stood up for Hikosu – Dudley was jealous of the natural violet haired girl, but even at his age he was a little perverted. Fortunately Harry always stepped in and defended her, grabbing her hand and running away. Dudley couldn't often catch him. Harry didn't look like it, but he was very fast.

Perhaps it had something to do with living in a dark cupboard. Both Harry and Hikosu were very pale, but Harry had always been small and skinny for his age. He looked even smaller and skinnier than he

really was because all he had to wear were old clothes of Dudley's, and Dudley was about four times bigger than he was. Harry had a thin face, knobbly knees, black hair, and, like previously stated, bright green eyes. He wore round glasses held together with a lot of Scotch tape because of all the times Dudley had punched him in the nose.

The only thing Harry liked about his own appearance was a very thin scar on his forehead that was shaped like a lightning bolt. It was very curious that Hikosu also had a lightning bolt shaped scar on her forehead as well, but then again they both received them when they were young. Harry had had it as long as he could remember, and the first question he could ever remember asking his Aunt Petunia was how he had gotten it.

"In the car crash when your mother died." She had said, "And don't ask questions." Hikosu had asked the question as well, but got a much more pleasant answer.

"Poor Diddydums knocked you down and you hit your head on the door. He was traumatized and didn't know his own strength!" she had pretended to reminisce. She had politely asked her not to ask any more questions because it brought up to many bad memories.

Don't ask questions – that was the first rule for a quiet life with the Dursleys.

Uncle Vernon entered the kitchen as Harry was turning over the bacon; Hikosu entered in the back door with her hair combed and clothes straight. Aunt Petunia immediately hurried over and ushered her upstairs to where she would pamper and pinch her into the second hand dress. She shot Harry a pleading look as they went through the door, but he only winked at her as he went back to cooking the bacon.

"Comb your hair!" Uncle Vernon barked, by way of a morning greeting. About once a week, Uncle Vernon looked over the top of his newspaper and shouted that Harry needed a new haircut. Harry must have had more haircuts than the rest of the boys in his class put together, but it made no difference, his hair simply grew that way – all over the place. The stormy grey eyed girl didn't mind, though. She simply ruffled his hair and stated that it gave him character.

Harry was frying eggs by the time Dudley arrived in the kitchen with his mother. Dudley looked a lot like Uncle Vernon. He had a large pink face, not much neck, small, watery blue eyes, and thick blond hair that lay smoothly on his thick, fat head. See the resemblance? Yeah, I bet you do.

Aunt Petunia often said that Dudley looked like a baby angel – Harry often said that Dudley looked like a pig in a wig. Hikosu thought so as well, but she couldn't voice her opinions...which might have been a good thing.

Harry put the plates of egg and bacon on the table, which was difficult as there wasn't much room. Dudley, meanwhile, was counting his presents. His face fell.

"Thirty-six," he said, looking up at his mother and father. "That's two less than last year."

"Darling, you haven't counted Auntie Marge's present, see, its here under this big one from Mommy and Daddy." Aunt Petunia said, coming back into the kitchen. Hikosu was trailed behind her with a highly disturbed look on her face.

Bloody hell...Harry don't you DARE laugh at me. The stormy grey eyed girl mumbled as he turned to look at her. Immediately he snorted in his food. Aunt Petunia managed to change her ribbon and now it was a bright pink color – it matched her poofy dress nicely. The dress itself had lace around the neck and puffed sleeves. The skirt of the dress went down to her knees and she had a small petticoat underneath it. White stockings were on her feet and black Mary-Jane style shoes were on her feet. Her hair had been pulled up into twin pigtails, but her face was clear of makeup...fortunately. Hikosu looked miserable.

Harry...stop it! She whined, pouting her lips. Aunt Petunia took it as a 'I like this dress!' and cheerfully turned to the others.

"All right, thirty-seven then," said Dudley, going red in the face. Harry, who could see a huge Dudley tantrum coming on, began wolfing down his bacon as fast as possible in case Dudley turned the table over.

Aunt Petunia obviously scented danger, too, because she said quickly, "And we'll buy you another two presents while we're out today. How's that, popkin? Two more presents. Is that all right?" Dudley thought for a moment. It looked like hard work, the poor sod. Finally he said slowly,

"So I'll have thirty...thirty..." aww, poor boy can't count...

"Thirty-nine, sweetums," said Aunt Petunia. Through the whole exchange Hikosu had gone to sit next to Harry. She moved the chair so that they were closer than the others; Harry didn't mind of course.

"Oh." Dudley sat down heavily and grabbed the nearest parcel. "All right then."

Uncle Vernon chuckled.

"Little tyke wants his money's worth, just like his father. 'Atta boy, Dudley!" he ruffled Dudley's hair. At that moment the telephone rang and Aunt Petunia went to answer it while Harry, Hikosu, and Uncle Vernon watched Dudley unwrap the racing bike, a video camera, a remote control airplane, sixteen new computer games, and a VCR. He was ripping the paper off a gold wristwatch when Aunt Petunia came back from the telephone looking both angry and worried.

What's her problem? Hikosu asked, exchanging a curious look with her best friend. He only shrugged and they turned back to the conversation.

"Bad news, Vernon," she said. "Mrs. Figg's broken her leg. She can't take him." She jerked her head in Harry's direction. Often enough Harry told the stormy grey eyed girl that it didn't matter, but Hikosu was often furious that they refused to take Harry with them whenever they went out.

Dudley's mouth fell open in horror, but Harry's heart gave a great leap. Every year on Dudley's birthday, his parents took him, Hikosu, and a friend out for the day – much to Hikosu's displeasure because of her dresses – to adventure parks, hamburger restaurants, or the movies. Every year, Harry was left behind with Mrs. Figg, a mad old lady who lived two streets away. Harry hated it there. The whole house smelled of cabbage and Mrs. Fig made him look at photographs of all the cats she'd ever owned.



Really, can you imagine actually enjoying that?

"Now what?" said Aunt Petunia, looking furiously at Harry as though he'd planned this. Harry knew he ought to feel sorry that Mrs. Figg had broken her leg, but it wasn't easy when he reminded himself it would be a while year before he had to look at Tibbles, Snowy, , and Tufty again.

"We could phone Marge," Uncle Vernon suggested.

Oh, Lord, not Marge...Harry I feel sorry for you. Hikosu whispered in his mind. Harry stole a quick look to the girl sitting beside him as she smiled at him.

"Don't be silly, Vernon, she hates the boy." The Dursleys often spoke about Harry like this, as though he wasn't there – or rather, as though he was something very nasty that couldn't understand them, like a slug. Hikosu glared at the two of them, but Aunt Petunia misinterpreted the glare as a glare towards Harry.

"Don't worry Dorothea, we'll think of something." She said, patting her hand. Harry wanted to bite back and say her name was Hikosu, but the girl in question only sent him a sharp look.

"What about what's-her-name, your friend –Yvonne?"

"On vacation in Majorca," snapped Aunt Petunia.

"You could just leave me here," Harry put in hopefully. He'd be able to watch what he wanted on television for a change and maybe even have a go on Dudley's computer.

What? And leave me to suffer alone? Harry! Hikosu playfully shoved the emerald eyed boy on the shoulder, which made both of the Dursley adults smile in glee. Aunt Petunia's face quickly changed, though, and she looked as though she'd just swallowed a lemon.

"And come back and find the house in ruins?" she snarled.

"I won't blow up the house," said Harry, but they weren't listening.

"I suppose we could take him to the zoo," said Aunt Petunia slowly, "...and leave him in the car..."

"That car's new; he's not sitting in it alone..."

Bloody hell! How dare they say things like that! I'd like to give them a piece of my mind, but Lard-Head hasn't bought me any new notebooks! Hikosu seethed. Her voice was loud and clear in Harry's mind, but nobody besides the emerald eyed boy noticed that her irises were slowly bleeding into molten silver.

Dudley began to cry loudly. In fact, he wasn't really crying – it had been years since he'd really cried – but he knew that if he screwed up his face and wailed, his mother would give him anything he wanted...except to give his 'sister' away. He made sure that she knew that the two weren't related – he even went as far as to say that her father, the man in the picture in her broken locket, didn't want her anymore.

"Dinky Duddydums, don't cry. Mummy won't let him spoil your special day!" she cried, flinging her arms around him.

"I...don't...want...him...t-t-to...come!" Dudley yelled between huge, pretend sobs. "He always sp-spoils everything!" he shot Harry a nasty grin through the gap in his mother's arms.

Just then, the doorbell rang – "Oh, good Lord, they're here!" said Aunt Petunia frantically – and a moment later, Dudley's best friend, Piers Polkiss, walked in with his mother. Piers was a scrawny boy with a face like a rat. He was usually the one who held people's arms behind their backs while Dudley hit them. He sidled over behind Hikosu and pinched her side, leering at her, then walked over to his friend. Dudley stopped pretending to cry at once.

Oh! Who does he think he is? Hikosu whispered in Harry's mind. Her eyes were still that vibrant shade of silver, but what surprised her was the fact that the emerald eyed boy sent a heated glare in Piers' direction. She knew he was protective, but she didn't think he would do that with so many people present.

Half an hour later, Harry, who couldn't believe his luck, was sitting in the back of the Dursley's car with Piers and Dudley, on the way to the zoo for the first time in his life. The stormy grey eyed girl was

forced to sit in the front with Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon. His aunt and uncle hadn't been able to think of anything else to do with him, but before they'd left, Uncle Vernon had taken Harry aside.

"I'm warning you," he had said, putting his large purple face right up close to Harry's, "I'm warning you now, boy – any funny business, anything at all – and you'll be in that cupboard from now until Christmas."

"I'm not going to do anything," said Harry, "honestly..."

But Uncle Vernon didn't believe him. No one ever did.

The problem was, strange things often happened around Harry and Hikosu, though they usually blamed it on Harry anyway, and it was just no good telling the Dursleys he didn't make them happen.

Once, Aunt Petunia, tired of Harry coming back from the cheapest barber they could find looking as though he hadn't been at all, had taken a pair of kitchen scissors and cut his hair so short he was almost bald except for his bangs, which she left "to hide that horrible scar." Dudley had laughed himself silly at Harry, who spent a sleepless night imagining school the next day, where he was already laughed at for his baggy clothes and taped glasses.

Hikosu once told Aunt Petunia that she saw a great white wolf out in their front yard staring at her through the window. Petunia had naturally freaked and looked out the window to only see a normal white husky. Although it was unusual for them to be in the area, some people had them bred because of their beauty. Petunia merely told her she had a strong imagination.

Another time, Aunt Petunia had been trying to force him into a revolting old sweater of Dudley's – brown with orange puff balls. The harder she tried to pull it over his head, the smaller it seemed to become, until finally it might have fitted a hand puppet, but certainly wouldn't fit Harry. Aunt Petunia had decided it must have shrunk in the wash and, to his great relief, Harry wasn't punished.

Yet another time, Hikosu came inside scared stiff. She ran into Petunia, who had asked her why she was scared, and she hastily wrote down that she saw a hawk on a tree outside. She was about to go on her way, but the hawk had said her name! And she

understood it! Petunia just laughed and said that Harry was filling her head with meaningless games, but by the look on her face and the tears glistening in her eyes Harry knew she wasn't lying. It was just a feeling he got deep in his soul.

Every now and then she could hear faint traces of animals talking to her. They would help her run away from Dudley or any bullies and, in return, she would try to feed them. They were nice to Harry, too.

On the other hand, Harry had gotten into terrible trouble for the two of them being found on the roof of the school kitchens. Dudley's gang had been chasing them as usual when, as much to Harry and Hikosu's surprise as anyone else's, there they were sitting on the chimney. Actually, Harry was sitting on the chimney with Hikosu sitting on his lap. The Dursleys had received a very angry letter from Harry and Hikosu's headmistress telling them Harry and Hikosu had been climbing school buildings. Harry was the one who had gotten in trouble despite Hikosu's silent pleas and silver stained eyes.

All he'd tried to do, as he shouted at Uncle Vernon through the locked door of his cupboard, was jump behind the big trash cans outside the kitchen doors with Hikosu behind him. Harry supposed that the wind must have caught them in mid-jump.

But today, nothing was going to go wrong. It was even worth being with Dudley and Piers, and Hikosu happened to be a special life saver, to be spending the day somewhere that wasn't school, his cupboard, Hikosu's shed, or Mrs. Figg's cabbage-smelling living room.

While he drove, Uncle Vernon complained to Aunt Petunia. He liked to complain about things: people at work, Harry, the council, Hikosu and Harry, the bank, Hikosu, and Harry were just a few of his favorite subjects. This morning, it was motorcycles.

"...roaring along like maniacs, the young hoodlums." He said, as a motorcycle overtook them.

"I had a dream about a motorcycle," said Harry, remembering suddenly. "It was flying...and Hikosu was in it."

Really? I had a dream about a cloaked figure riding a great panther and that white wolf I keep seeing in weird places. Hikosu described, glancing back to see her best friend's expression.

Uncle Vernon nearly crashed into the car in front. He turned right around in his seat and yelled at Harry, his face like a gigantic beet with that stolen walrus hair that he had yet to return.

"MOTORCYCLES DON'T FLY!"

"Her name is Dorothea!"

Holy – tone it down! What, is he trying to deafen me, over here? Hikosu winced at the loudness of Uncle Vernon's voice. She had taken the brunt of the shout since she was sitting right next to him. Petunia was at least a little quieter.

Dudley and Piers sniggered.

"I know they don't," said Harry. "It was only a dream"

It was times like these that he wished he could have an actual conversation with Hikosu, but unfortunately they were only able to have one when they were alone.

Now, Harry wished he hadn't said anything. If there was one thing that the Dursleys hated even more than his asking questions, it was his talking about anything acting in a way it shouldn't, no matter if it was in a dream or even a cartoon – they seemed to think he might get dangerous ideas. It was a very sunny Saturday and the zoo was crowded with families. The Dursleys bought Dudley and Piers large chocolate ice creams at the entrance and then, because the smiling lady in the van asked what both Harry and Hikosu wanted before they could hurry them away, they bought the two young children cheap lemon ice pops. It wasn't bad either, Harry thought, licking it as they watched a gorilla scratching its head that looked remarkably like Dudley, except that it wasn't blond. I feel bad for the gorilla.

Hikosu, however, despised the taste of lemon. She gave Harry her ice pop when he was finished with his. Harry had the best morning he'd had in a long time. he was careful to walk a little way apart from the Dursleys so that Dudley and Piers, who were starting to get

bored with the animals by lunchtime, wouldn't fall back on their favorite hobby of hitting him.

Although Harry was used to walking alone, he was surprised when the stormy grey eyed girl slowed down until they were walking together. Subtly she slipped a hand into his and smiled at him before frowning and tugging on the pink ribbon that was tied tightly around her neck. Every so often he would glance over at her with a worried expression; since she could understand animals he wondered what it was like for all of them to be 'talking' at the same time.

Once, she caught him looking at her and forced a smile.

I'm ok, Harry. All of the animals are giving me a small headache, that's all. She said, but he wasn't convinced.

"Are you sure?" he asked as they slowed to a stop. She didn't reply, but she squeezed his hand in an assuring manner. After their little exchange they ate in the zoo restaurant, and when Dudley had a tantrum because his knickerbocker glory didn't have enough ice cream on top, Uncle Vernon bought him another one and Harry and Hikosu were allowed to share the first.

Harry felt, afterward, that he should have known it was all too good to last.

After lunch they went to the reptile house. It was cool and dark in there, with lit windows all along the walls. Behind the glass, all sorts of lizards and snakes were crawling and slithering over bits of wood and stone. Dudley and Piers wanted to see huge, poisonous cobras and thick, man-crushing pythons.

Dudley quickly found the largest snake in the place. It could have wrapped its body twice around Uncle Vernon's car and crushed it into a trash can – but at the moment it didn't look in the mood. In fact, it was fast asleep. Dudley stood with his nose pressed against the glass, staring at the glistening brown coils.

"Make it move," he whined at his father. Uncle Vernon tapped on the glass, but the snake didn't budge.

"Do it again," Dudley ordered. Uncle Vernon rapped the glass smartly with his knuckles, but the snake just snoozed on.

Why don't they leave that poor animal alone? Hikosu sighed noiselessly as she and Harry looked at the other snakes. All of the animals had greeted her cheerfully, but doing so at all the same time gave her such a huge headache. Now, the tapping on the glass was making it worse.

"We should be leaving soon, I would guess. I dunno, but are you sure you're ok?" Harry asked, worried once again for the health of his best friend. She only nodded, using her free hand to pull out the necklace with the mysterious man's picture in it. Petunia wouldn't say who he was, only that he was Hikosu's biological father and that he obviously didn't want her anymore since she arrived on the Dursleys' doorstep.

"This is boring," Dudley moaned. He shuffled away. Harry moved in front of the tank, guiding the stormy grey eyed girl behind him. They stood, looking intently at the snake. He wouldn't have been surprised if it had died of boredom itself – no company except stupid people drumming their fingers on the glass trying to disturb it all day long. It was worse than having a cupboard as a bedroom, where the only visitor was Aunt Petunia hammering on the door to wake you up; at least he got to visit the rest of the house.

The snake suddenly opened its beady eyes. Slowly, very slowly, it raised its head until its eyes were on a level with Harry's.

It winked.

Harry stared. Then he looked quickly around to see if anyone was watching. They weren't. nobody besides Hikosu and she was looking at the snake with wide eyes. She smiled and he looked back at the snake, winking as well.

The snake jerked its head toward Uncle Vernon and Dudley, then raised its eyes to the ceiling. It gave Harry a look that said quite plainly:

"I get that all the time."

"I know," Harry murmured through the glass, though he wasn't sure the snake could hear him. "It must be very annoying."

The snake nodded vigorously.

Harry...he can understand you. How come you never told me you could talk to snakes? Hikosu asked with a hurt voice. He blanched, a cold feeling creeping into his heart. The emerald eyed boy looked over to the stormy grey eyed girl with wide eyes, trying to quench the feeling in his heart.

"I...I didn't know. I've never talked to a snake before." He replied.

Do you think you could understand him if he would talk to you? She asked, a small smile on her face now. The hurt was gone, replaced by understanding. The cold feeling was instantly swept away when he saw that she was no longer feeling that way.

"I don't know. Where do you come from, anyway?" Harry asked the snake. The snake jabbed its tail at a little sign next to the glass. Harry peered at it.

Boa Constrictor, Brazil. The snake was from Brazil.

"Was it nice there?"

The boa constrictor jabbed its tail at the sign again and Harry read on: This specimen was breed in the zoo.

"Oh, I see – so you've never been to Brazil?" as the snake shook its head a deafening shout behind Harry made all three of them jump.

"DUDLEY! MR. DURSLEY! COME AND LOOK AT THIS SNAKE! YOU WON'T BELIEVE WHAT IT'S DOING!" Dudley came waddling toward them as fast as he could.

"Out of the way, you two." He said, punching Harry in the ribs before he jabbed Hikosu in the kidney. Caught by surprise, Harry fell hard on the concrete floor. He couldn't be distracted for long because Hikosu fell as well with tears welling up in her eyes. Her mouth was open in a silent scream as she clutched the area where he jabbed her. Two things happened at once; Harry caught the stormy grey eyed girl while he sent a particularly nasty glare towards Dudley, and what came next happened so fast no one saw how it happened – one second, Piers and Dudley were leaning right up close to the glass, the next, they had leapt back with howls of horror.



Harry and Hikosu sat up and gasped; the glass front of the boa constrictor's tank had vanished. The great snake was uncoiling itself rapidly, slithering out onto the floor. People throughout the reptile house screamed and started running for the exits.

As the snake slid swiftly past him, Harry could have sworn a low, hissing voice said, "Brazil, here I come...Thanksss, amigo."

Harry, did you understand the snake? Hikosu asked, looking intently at the boy next to her. He only nodded dumbly as the snake went by.

The keeper of the reptile house was in shock.

"But the glass," he kept saying, "where did the glass go?"

The zoo director himself made Aunt Petunia a cup of strong, sweet tea while he apologized over and over again. Piers and Dudley could only gibber. As far as Harry had seen, the snake hadn't done anything except snap playfully at their heels as it passed, but by the time they were all back in Uncle Vernon's car, Dudley was telling them how it had nearly bitten off his leg, while Piers was swearing it had tried to squeeze him to death. But the worst part, for Harry at least, was Piers calming down enough to say, "Harry was talking to it, weren't you, Harry?"

Uncle Vernon waited until Piers was safely out of the house before starting on Harry. He was so angry he could hardly speak. He managed to say, "Go – cupboard – stay – no meals," before he collapsed into a chair, and Aunt Petunia had to run and get him a large brandy.

Later, after Hikosu nearly ran upstairs to tear that frilly dress off and changed into some comfier clothing – sweatpants and an overlarge shirt that Petunia bought secondhand – the two of them were lying in Harry's dark and cramped cupboard. He was wishing he had a watch. He didn't know what time it was and he couldn't be sure the Dursleys were asleep yet. Sometimes they let Hikosu sleep in the cupboard with him so he 'wouldn't get into any trouble'. Until the Dursleys were asleep, he couldn't risk sneaking to the kitchen for some food. Of course, the stormy grey eyed girl volunteered, but Harry would have none of it. If she were caught she could be punished, or worse...sent away.

He'd lived with the Dursleys almost ten years, ten miserable years, as long as he could remember, ever since he'd been a baby and his mother had died in that car crash. He couldn't remember being in the car when his mother had died. Sometimes, when he strained his memory during long hours in his cupboard, he came up with a strange vision: a blinding flash of green light and a burning pain on his forehead. This, he supposed was the crash, though he couldn't imagine where all the green light came from. He couldn't remember his parents at all. His aunt and uncle never spoke about them, and, of course, he was forbidden from asking questions. There were no photographs of them in the house.

When he had been younger, Harry had dreamed and dreamed of some unknown relation coming to take him and Hikosu away. But, of course, it never happened. The Dursleys were his only family. At least he had them – Hikosu didn't have anyone except for the man in her necklace...and he didn't even know if that man was still alive.

Yet sometimes he thought, or maybe hoped, that strangers in the street seemed to know him. Very strange strangers they were, too. A tiny man in a violet top hat had bowed to him once while out shopping with Aunt Petunia, Dudley, and Hikosu. When he had bowed to him, he had taken Hikosu's hand and kissed it. After asking Harry furiously if he knew the man, Aunt Petunia had rushed them out of the shop without buying anything.

A wild-looking old woman dressed all in green had waved merrily at them once on a bus. A bald man in a very long purple coat had actually shaken his hand in the street the other day and kissed Hikosu on the cheek...and then walked away without a word. The weirdest thing about all these people was the way they seemed to vanish the second Harry tried to get a closer look. Hikosu didn't mind – she thought that they were just expressing their friendliness in some sort of odd way.

At school, Harry had no one. He didn't care, though, for he enjoyed looking out for Hikosu. She was picked on much more than Harry ever could have been because of the fact that she couldn't talk and the ribbon around her neck never came off. Everybody knew that Dudley's gang hated that odd Harry Potter in his baggy old clothes and broken glasses, but they hated Hikosu more. And nobody – and I do mean nobody – liked to disagree with Dudley's gang.

Anything recognizable belongs to JK Rowling! I own Hikosu, Arista, and Cael.

Thanks to:

HarryBellaHermione - Thanks!

Raine44354 - I know! I hate that I can't do much romance since they're so young...but little by little they'll grow closer =D

TwilightEclps - lol Next chapter will be up after the next chapter of Prophecy of Truth

Ella950 - lol, well I'm glad.

StarSteller - I believe I covered everything with your review in my review response. It is simply too long to answer everything in a chapter for it will take away from the actual chapter.

Thanks again!

## Chapter Three

### Hikosu's Dream and the Letters

The escape of the Brazilian boa constrictor earned Harry his longest-ever punishment. It was also his worst punishment. He wasn't allowed to talk to Hikosu for she was locked in her shed outside. It was more for Harry's punishment, but the Dursleys were getting concerned that something 'strange' was going on with her.

The stormy grey eyed girl had started having strange dreams. There were animals who were talking to her, and then there was the white wolf. There was another woman and a man, but there was this...feeling that kept recurring in her dream. It wasn't bad – it was just strange. Strange and warm.

The night was hot and the natural violet haired girl was having yet another dream. This one was the most vivid dream she had ever had. In the cupboard under the stairs Harry felt like something was wrong, even in his sleep. A small frown marred his face as he tossed and turned in his sleep before he eventually calmed. Even if

he was awake he was a thin boy. There was no way that he would be able to get out from his cupboard.

Within the stormy grey eyed girl's mind...it was like a different world.

Hikosu was floating. There was nothing around her, nothing to harm her, and nothing to control her. She was simply there. Her body wouldn't respond to her brain's commands and that fact alone made her scared. Where was she? Where was Harry? Was this a dream? Was it real?

Her mind began racing, but her eyes remained closed. They were unable to open and she couldn't speak – not that that particular problem was new – or feel. Her body was numb. Suddenly, the natural violet haired girl just barely felt someone – or something – touch the hollow of her throat.

Suddenly...it was like her senses came alive. Her stormy grey eyes snapped open while the stormy irises bled into silver...and a voice entered her mind, ears, soul, and very being.

"Excito, meus darling. Excito ex vestri dormio. Nusquam vadium vulnero vos hic." (Wake, my darling. Wake from your slumber. Nothing shall harm you here.) Were the words that were spoken. The language seemed like it was in...Latin...but the words that echoed in her mind were plain English.

"What? Who are you? I mean...what are you?" the stormy grey eyed girl said out loud. Her voice was hoarse from not being able to use it. Wait a second...Hikosu's body flew forward as she realized that she could move. She could talk!

"Ego sum vestri sator." (I am your creator.) The voice said as a warm feeling caressed the young girl's body. She looked around curiously, but the only thing she could see was a vast amount of blackness.

"My creator? What does that mean? You're my mum or something?" the voice seemed like it would be female. After all, if it was Hikosu's creator and she had a father...then the only explanation was that the voice was female.

"Ego sum Terra Veneficus. Ego usus haud firmus vultus pro Ego sum valde core of veneficus universitas." (I am the Earthen Magic. I possess no solid form for I am the very core of the magical world.) The same voice calmly and warmly explained to the wide eyed stormy grey eyed girl.

Hikosu was confused. Earthen Magic? Magical world? This made no sense. It had to be a dream...but it was so real.

"Then...can you explain why I can understand animals? And why strange things always happen to Harry and me?" Hikosu asked with hopeful eyes. There was a long pause before the warm voice spoke again. It was like the girl was actually having a conversation with someone. It was...nice.

"Meus carus , panton mos planto voluntas vobis nunc. Northmanni Ego operor non directus rector humanus veneficus , tamen utpote vos es unus of meus liberi quod Ego voluntas atrum vicis appositus. Ego must tribuo vos a admonitio , parvulus." (My dear, everything will make sense to you soon. Normally I do not directly guide human magic, but since you are one of my children and I sense dark times approaching...I must give you a warning, child.) The words were becoming more rushed and the stormy grey eyed girl could barely make out what the voice was saying.

"What? What are you talking about? I don't understand! What warning?" Hikosu was becoming frustrated. She didn't understand how she could possibly understand Latin – it just wasn't possible! How in the bloody hell was she floating? Why would she need a warning? And just what in the seven levels of Hell is the Earthen Magic?

"Caveo posterus. Servo tener Differo propinquus. Vestri abbas...sit alive. Is diligo vos summopere Hikosu. Memor comprehendo veneficus quod Cael mos incubo vos!" (Beware the future. Keep young Harry close. Your father...he is alive. He loves you very much, Hikosu. Remember to embrace the magic and Cael will watch over you!) And with that the voice faded and a bright light blinded her. She closed her eyes and when she opened them again...

She was facing the incredibly cramped wall of the shed she was forced to sleep in. Hikosu was both terribly disappointed that her dream wouldn't at least answer her questions, no matter how fake

the answers might have been, and highly confused at what her dream had meant. Magic? Dark times? And someone named Cael...bollocks! The stormy grey eyed girl didn't even know anyone named Cael. After a few moments her eyelids grew heavy again and she rolled over, falling back into a dreamless sleep.

The next day Harry's punishment was over and the summer holidays had started. Dudley had already broken his new video camera, crashed his remote control airplane, and first time out on his racing bike, knocked down old Mrs. Figg as she crossed Privet Drive on her crutches.

Both Harry and Hikosu were glad that school was over, but there was no escaping Dudley's gang, who visited the house every single day. Piers, Dennis, Malcolm, and Gordon were all extremely big and extremely stupid. But, alas, since Dudley was the biggest and stupidest of the lot, he was the leader. The rest of them were all quite happy to join in Dudley's favorite sport: Harry Hunting. Of course, they did like to gang up in Hikosu quite a bit as well.

This was why Harry spent as much time as possible out of the house, taking the stormy grey eyed girl with him. They wandered around and thought about the end of the holidays where they could see a tiny ray of hope. When September came both of them would be going off to the same secondary school and, for the first time in their lives, they wouldn't have to put up with Dudley. The hideously obese boy had been accepted at Uncle Vernon's old private school...a school by the godawful name of Smeltings. Piers Polkiss was going there too.

Harry and Hikosu, on the other hand, were going to Stonewall High, the local public school. Dudley thought this was very funny, but Hikosu thought just the opposite. She knew she was going to be made fun of because of the fact that she couldn't speak. Harry consoled her, saying that he would be there for her, but there was always this nagging feeling in the back of his mind that there was something more he could do.

"They stuff people's heads down the toilet the first day at Stonewall," he told Harry. "Want to come upstairs and practice?"

"No, thanks," said Harry as he pulled Hikosu behind him, "The poor toilet's never had anything as horrible as your head down it – it

might be sick." Then he ran, pulling the silently laughing girl behind him before Dudley could work out what he'd said. Harry grinned, feeling on top of the world as he listened to the chiming bell that was tied to Hikosu's wrist.

One day in July, Aunt Petunia took Dudley to London to buy his Smeltings uniform, leaving Harry and Hikosu, at the stormy grey eyed girl's insistence, at Mrs. Figg's. Mrs. Figg wasn't as bad as usual. It turned out she'd broken her leg tripping over one of her cats, and she didn't seem quite as fond of them as before. She let the two children watch television and gave them a bit of chocolate cake that tasted as though she'd had it for several years. She left them to their own devices, fairly sure that they would be able to take care of themselves.

It was then that Harry turned to his best friend with a worried expression on his face. He was no idiot. He could sense that something was bothering the stormy grey eyed girl that was sitting next to him.

"Hikosu, are you alright?" he asked, staring at her face for any hint at what was going on.

Harry, I'm fine...stop worrying 'bout me. She sighed. Ever since she told him of her first dream he had been badgering her about them.

"Was it another dream? I can tell something's bothering you." Harry said, eyes narrowing as his heart began to quicken. Something was wrong...and it was unusual for Hikosu not to tell him what she was feeling.

I'm FINE. She replied shortly, setting down the half eaten piece of cake and turning away from the boy sitting next to her. She was confused about her dreams and she was not one to like being confused.

"No you're not. Now talk to me, you always did before. What's changed?" Harry said quietly as he hugged his best friend from behind. His heart was still beating fast, but a warm feeling spread through his body when he noticed a small smile on the girl's face.

You always know me so well, don't you Harry? Hikosu sighed, turning around and hugging the boy tightly.

"Of course. You're my best friend. It's my job." Harry admonished, wagging a finger in her face. He may be almost eleven, but he was still a good friend.

Can...I tell you later? Back at the house? Hikosu whispered, pulling back to look him in the eye. His emerald orbs were sparkling happily – he knew that she was feeling better when a small smile stretched across her face.

"Yeah, sure. Just don't forget, okay?" he murmured as they hugged again. She shook her head and laughed silently and not for the first time Harry wondered what her laugh sounded like.

That evening, Dudley paraded around the living room for the family in his brand-new uniform. Smeltings' boys wore maroon tailcoats, orange knickerbockers, and flat straw hats called boaters. They also carried knobbly sticks, used for hitting each other while the teachers weren't looking. This was supposed to be good training for later life...yeah training to be gits.

As he looked at Dudley in his new knickerbockers, Uncle Vernon said gruffly that it was the proudest moment of his life. Aunt Petunia burst into tears and said she couldn't believe it was her Ickle Dudleykins – he looked so handsome and grown-up. Harry didn't trust himself to speak. He thought two of his ribs might already have cracked from trying not to laugh. The stormy grey eyed girl, however, was openly laughing with tears streaming down her face.

Unfortunately, with all of the commotion at their house Hikosu completely forgot to tell Harry about her dream. Harry didn't mind simply due to the fact that he forgot as well. They were almost eleven so it didn't really matter.

There was a horrible smell in the kitchen the next morning when Harry went in for breakfast. The stormy grey eyed girl was already there, sitting in a corner with one of her small hands pressed against her face. The stench seemed to be coming from a large metal tub in the sink. He went to have a look and nearly reeled back from the smell. The tub was full of what looked like dirty rags swimming in gray water.

"What's this?" he asked Aunt Petunia



They're our new prison rags. Hikosu sarcastically said, winking at the emerald eyed boy. He smiled at her obvious good mood, but Petunia wasn't as happy. The older woman's lips tightened as they always did if he dared to ask a question.

"Your new school uniform. Hikosu and I will go to the surplus store later." She said. Harry looked in the bowl again. Suddenly, he had the urge to make the stormy grey eyed girl laugh.

"Oh," he said, "I didn't realize it had to be so wet." The boy was rewarded as a new bell – now attached to the ribbon on her neck, courtesy of Petunia, since she lost her other one – chimed as Hikosu started giggling.

"Don't be stupid," snapped Aunt Petunia. "I'm dying some of Dudley's old things gray for you. It'll look just like everyone else's when I've finished."

Harry seriously doubted this, but thought it best not to argue. He was getting new clothes at least. The emerald eyed boy sat down at the table next to Hikosu and tried not to think about how he was going to look on his first day at Stonewall High – like he was wearing bits of old elephant skin, probably. They'll be loose, grey, and wrinkly.

Dudley and Uncle Vernon came in, both with wrinkled noses because of the smell of Harry's new uniform. Uncle Vernon opened his newspaper as usual and Dudley banged his Smelting stick, which he carried everywhere, on the table. They heard the click of the mail slot and flop of letter son the doormat.

"Get the mail, Dudley," said Uncle Vernon from behind his paper.

"Make Hikosu get it."

"She doesn't have to do anything if she doesn't want to!" Harry ground out. He was getting sick and tired of Dudley picking on his best friend. She looked at him with wide eyes at first, but they instantly softened when their eyes met. She smiled in thanks, leaning over and giving him a short peck on the cheek.

"Get the mail, Harry."

"Make Dudley get it."

"Poke him with your Smelting stick, Dudley."

Harry lowly growled, but he dodged the Smelting stick and went to get the mail. Four things lay on the doormat: a postcard from Uncle Vernon's sister Marge, who was vacationing on the Isle of Wight, a brown envelope that looked like a bill, and – a letter for Harry. His eyes widened and his heart quickened as he looked at the last letter. It was a letter for Hikosu.

Harry picked up the pile and stared at his letter, his heart twanging like a giant elastic band. No one, ever, in his whole life, had written to him. Who would? He had no friends except for Hikosu...and she lived with him. He didn't belong to the library, so he'd never even got rude notes asking for books back. Yet here it was, a letter, addressed so plainly there could be no mistake:

Mr. H. Potter

The Cupboard under the Stairs

4 Privet Drive

Little Whinging

Surrey

The envelope was thick and heavy, made of yellowish parchment, and the address was written in emerald-green ink. There was no stamp.

Hikosu's letter was exactly the same...hers was addressed differently, though. Instead it read:

Miss H. Snape

The Shed in the Backyard

4 Privet Drive

Little Whinging

Surrey

It was surreal. The only person that would be writing to Hikosu would be...her father perhaps? But then why would it have the same type of parchment and the same colored ink.

Turning his envelope over, his hand trembling, Harry saw a purple wax seal bearing a coat of arms; a lion, an eagle, a badger, and a snake surrounding a large letter H.

"Hurry up, boy!" shouted Uncle Vernon from the kitchen. "What are you doing, checking for letter bombs?" the large beefy man chuckled at his own joke. Harry went back to the kitchen, still staring at his letter. He handed Hikosu hers and then handed Uncle Vernon the bill and postcard. He sat down and slowly began to open the yellow envelope.

Uncle Vernon ripped open the bill, snorted in disgust, and flipped over the postcard. The stormy grey eyed girl eyed her letter curiously before opening it. She never got a chance to read it because Dudley viciously ripped it from her grip. In doing so the letter was violently ripped in several pieces. Her mouth opened in a silent wail as tears formed in her eyes – Harry was in a similar situation with his letter.

"Marge's ill," Vernon informed the skinny woman that claimed to be her mum. "Ate a funny whelk..." he continued as Dudley zeroed in on Harry's letter.

"Dad!" said Dudley suddenly. "Dad, Harry's got something!" apparently he learned from just suddenly grabbing it out of someone's hands.

Harry was at the point of unfolding his letter, which was written on the same heavy parchment as the envelope, when it was jerked sharply out of his hand by Uncle Vernon.

"That's mine" said Harry, trying to snatch it back.

"Who'd be writing to you?" sneered Uncle Vernon, shaking the letter open with one hand and glancing at it. His face went from red to

green faster than a set of traffic lights. And it didn't stop there. Within seconds it was the grayish white of old porridge.

"P-P-Petunia!" he gasped.

Dudley tried to grab the letter to read it, but Uncle Vernon held it high out of his reach. Petunia bent and collected the remains of Hikosu's letter, reading it with the same expression as Vernon did with Harry's. Aunt Petunia looked for a moment like she might faint. She clutched her throat and made a choking noise.

"Vernon! Oh my goodness – Vernon!"

They stared at each other, seeming to have forgotten that Harry, Dudley, and Hikosu were still in the room. Dudley wasn't used to being ignored. He gave his father a sharp tap on the head with his Smelting stick.

"I want to read that letter," he said loudly.

"I want to read it," said Harry furiously, "as it's mine"

Well what about me? The bloody git tore mine to pieces! Hikosu explained, a wave of unfamiliar anger that wasn't his suddenly flashing through Harry as the stormy grey eyed girl glared at Dudley.

"Get out, all of you," croaked Uncle Vernon, stuffing the letter back inside its envelope. Harry didn't move, but Hikosu made to stand. She was angry, yes, but she was only an almost eleven year old girl.

"I WANT MY LETTER!" Harry shouted, startling Hikosu from her anger.

"Let me see it!" demanded Dudley.

"OUT!" roared Uncle Vernon, and he took both Harry and Dudley by the scruffs of their necks and threw them into the hall, slamming the kitchen door behind them. Hikosu was already sitting in the hallway with her back against the cupboard door. With a worried glance from the emerald eyed boy, she curled her arms against her legs and rested her chin on top of them.

Harry and Dudley then had a furious but silent fight over who would listen at the keyhole; Dudley won, so Harry, his glasses dangling from one ear, lay flat on his stomach to listen at the crack between door and floor.

"Vernon," Aunt Petunia was saying in a quivering voice, "Look at the addresses – how could they possibly know where they sleep? You don't think they're watching the house?"

"Watching – spying – might be following us. What about that wolf the girl keeps yammering about? The white one?" muttered Uncle Vernon wildly.

"But what should we do, Vernon? Should we write back? Tell them we don't want –"

Harry could see Uncle Vernon's shiny black shoes pacing up and down the kitchen.

"No," he said finally. "No, we'll ignore it. If they don't get an answer...yes, that's best...we won't do anything...."

"But –"

"I'm not having one, let alone two, in the house, Petunia! Didn't we swear when we took him in we'd stamp out that dangerous nonsense! And that girl – she's supposed to be even worse! According to that blasted letter we got when she was dumped here, she's not even human!"

The conversation sent Harry's mind reeling. What nonsense? What letter? How in the seven levels of Hell could Hikosu not be human? He wanted answers and by Jove he was going to get them one way or another!

Unfortunately, fate had other plans. Well, not fate. Mostly Uncle Vernon had other plans.

That evening when he got back from work, Uncle Vernon did something he'd never done before; he visited Harry in his cupboard.

"Where's my letter?" said Harry, the moment Uncle Vernon had squeezed through the door.

"Who's writing to me?"

"No one. It was addressed to you by mistake," said Uncle Vernon shortly. "I have burned it."

"It was not a mistake," said Harry angrily. After all, Hikosu had gotten one with the exact same paper and written in the exact same ink. They were even addressed the same way!

"It had my cupboard on it."

"SILENCE!" yelled Uncle Vernon, and a couple of spiders fell from the ceiling. He took a few deep breaths and then forced his face into a smile, which looked quite painful.

"Er-yes, Harry – about this cupboard. Your aunt and I have been thinking...you're really getting a bit big for it...we think it might be nice if you moved into Dudley's second bedroom." Vernon said.

"What about Hikosu? Her shed is smaller than my cupboard. Surly she can use the room more." Harry retorted. He hated how his Uncle Vernon was never thinking about the stormy grey eyed girl. He even made her sleep in the shed during the winter!

"Well –er- if you feel Dorothea should need the room more...how about you share it? There's only one bed for now, but – well – I suppose I can find a spare mattress lying about." The big beefy man stuttered.

"Why?" asked Harry.

"Don't ask questions!" snapped his uncle. Apparently he had used his quota of niceness for the day. "Take this stuff upstairs, now."

The Dursleys' house had four bedrooms: one for Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia, one for visitors (usually Uncle Vernon's sister, Marge), one where Dudley slept, and one where Dudley kept all the toys and things that wouldn't fit into his first bedroom. It only took Harry one trip upstairs to move everything he owned from the cupboard to this room and Hikosu took only one as well. It wasn't like they owned much of anything.

He sat down on the bed and stared around him, patting the spot next to him when Hikosu appeared. She curled up next to the emerald eyed boy and yawned.

Why did Vernon want me inside? He's never wanted me inside before... the stormy grey eyed girl asked, looking at her best friend with big eyes.

"I told him you'd need the room more." Harry replied, looking over at her. A warm feeling spread through his chest when he witnessed her smile.

Aww, really? My hero. She said, leaning up and kissing the emerald eyed boy on the cheek. He flushed but a grin spread across his face.

Anyway, what're we going to do when we sleep? She asked him as she curled up by his side again.

"Dunno. I guess I can sleep on the floor until Uncle Vernon brings in the spare mattress. If he remembers that is." Harry mumbled, not liking the idea of sleeping on the floor, but he didn't want Hikosu sleeping on the floor either.

Don't worry. We can share the bed...as long as you don't do anything perverted. Hikosu laughed as her best friend's face turned a bright shade of red.

"Hikosu!" he exclaimed, laughing as the girl beside him burst into a fit of silent giggles.

As the stormy grey eyed girl settled into a nap, Harry looked around the room. Nearly everything in there was broken. The month-old video camera was lying on top of a small, working tank Dudley had once driven over the next door neighbor's dog; in the corner was Dudley's first-ever television set, which he'd put his foot through when his favorite program had been canceled. There was a large birdcage, which had once held a parrot that Dudley had swapped at school for a real air rifle, which was upon on a shelf with the end all bent because Dudley had sat on it. Other shelves were full of books...which were probably never read. They were the only things in the room that looked as though they'd never been touched.

From downstairs came the sound of Dudley bawling at his mother, "I don't want them there! I need that room...make them get out...move him back to the cupboard...kick her out of the house if you have to!"

Harry sighed and tried not to get angry. He stretched out on the bed, smiling as Hikosu instantly nestled into his side. It was just like when they shared his cupboard. Yesterday he'd have given anything to be up here. Today, he'd rather be back in his cupboard with that letter than up here without it. The only good thing was that Hikosu was now inside and protected from the elements.

Next morning at breakfast, everyone was rather quiet. Dudley was in shock. He'd screamed, whacked his father with his Smelting stick, been sick on purpose, kicked his mother, and thrown his tortoise through the greenhouse roof, and he still didn't have his room back. Harry was thinking about this time yesterday and bitterly wishing he'd opened the letter in the hall. Hikosu's head was on his shoulder, she had already told him that she'd woken up in the middle of the night and hadn't been able to go back to sleep. Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia kept looking at each other darkly.

When the mail arrived, Uncle Vernon, who seemed to be trying to be nice to the children who weren't his, made Dudley go and get it. They heard him banging things with his Smelting stick all the way down the hall. Then he shouted, "There's more! 'Mr. H. Potter, The Smallest Bedroom...' and 'Miss H. Snape, The Smallest Bedroom...' \_"

With a strangled cry, Uncle Vernon leapt from his seat and ran down the hall. Harry had jumped up and Hikosu fell from her chair. He sent her an apologetic look before following Vernon while Petunia jumped up to help her to her feet.

Uncle Vernon had to wrestle Dudley to the ground to get the letters from him, which was made difficult by the fact that Harry had grabbed Uncle Vernon around the neck from behind. After a minute of confused fighting, in which everyone got hit a lot by the Smelting stick, Uncle Vernon straightened up, gasping for breath, with Harry's letter clutched in his hand. Once again, Hikosu's letter was torn to pieces.



"Go to your cupboard – I mean, your bedroom." He wheezed at Harry. "Dudley – go – just go." Hikosu was still in the kitchen, but she would be sent to her room later.

Harry walked round and round his new room as the stormy grey eyed girl entered. They shared a confused look. Someone knew he had moved out of his cupboard and they seemed to know he hadn't received his first letter. The same thing was happening to Hikosu. Surely that meant they'd try again? And this time he'd make sure they didn't fail. He had a plan.

The repaired alarm clock rang at six o'clock the next morning. Harry turned it off quickly and dressed silently before covering Hikosu once again. She'd been having more of those dreams, but he hadn't bothered her again since they forgot to talk about it. She needed her sleep. He opened the door as quietly as he could because he couldn't wake the Dursleys. He stole downstairs without turning on any of the lights.

He was going to wait for the postman on the corner of Privet Drive and get the letters for number four first. His heart hammered as he crept across the dark hall toward the front door –

"AARGH!"

Harry leapt into the air; he'd trodden on something big and squashy on the doormat – something alive!

Lights clicked on upstairs and to his horror Harry realized that the big, squashy something had been his uncle's face. Uncle Vernon had been lying at the foot of the front door in a sleeping bag, clearly making sure that Harry didn't do exactly what he'd been trying to do. He shouted at Harry for about half an hour and then told him to go and make a cup of tea. The emerald eyed boy shuffled miserably off into the kitchen and by the time he got back, the mail had arrived, right into Uncle Vernon's lap. Harry could see six letters addressed in green ink. Three for him and three for Hikosu.

"I want –" he began, but Uncle Vernon was tearing the letters into pieces before his eyes. The sound of a bell chiming caught his attention and he looked up the stairs just in time to see the stormy grey eyed girl dash back into their room. A pang of coldness hit his

chest when he realized that tears had been streaming down her cheeks.

Uncle Vernon didn't go to work that day. He stayed at home and nailed up the mail slot.

"See," he explained to Aunt Petunia through a mouthful of nails, "if they can't deliver them they'll just give up."

"I'm not sure that'll work, Vernon."

"Oh, these people's minds work in strange ways, Petunia, they're not like you and me," said Uncle Vernon, trying to knock in a nail with the piece of fruitcake Aunt Petunia had just brought him.

On Friday, no less than twelve letters arrived for each of the two magical children. As they couldn't go through the mail slot they had been pushed under the door, slotted through the sides, and a few even forced through the small window in the downstairs bathroom.

Uncle Vernon stayed at home again. After burning all the letters, he got out a hammer and nails and boarded up the cracks around the front and back doors so no one could go out. He hummed "Tiptoe Through the Tulips" as he worked, and jumped at small noises. There was definitely something wrong with him.

On Saturday, things began to definitely get out of hand. Twenty-four letters to Harry and Twenty-four letters to Hikosu found their way into the house, rolled up and hidden inside each of the two dozen eggs that their very confused milkman had handed Aunt Petunia and inside two dozen cans of canned fruit. While Uncle Vernon made furious telephone calls to the post office and the dairy trying to find someone to complain to while Aunt Petunia shredded the letters in her food processor.

"Who on Earth wants to talk to you two this badly?" Dudley asked Harry and Hikosu in amazement. On Sunday morning, Uncle Vernon sat down at the breakfast table looking tired and rather ill, but happy. Hikosu didn't even bother to come down – she was once again up all night due to the reoccurring dream she had been having. The one about the Earthen magic and the warning. It was like a movie and out of body experience put together.

"No post on Sundays," he reminded them cheerfully as he spread marmalade on his newspapers, "no damn letters today –"

Something came whizzing down the kitchen chimney as he spoke and caught him sharply on the back of the head. Next moment, thirty or forty letters – each – came pelting out of the fireplace like bullets. The Dursleys ducked, but Harry leapt into the air trying to catch one.

"Out! OUT!"

Uncle Vernon seized Harry around the waist and threw him into the hall. When Aunt Petunia and Dudley had run out with their arms over their faces, Uncle Vernon slammed the door shut. They could hear the letters still streaming into the room, bouncing off the walls and floor.

"That does it," said Uncle Vernon, trying to speak calmly but pulling great tufts of walrus hair out of his mustache at the same time.

"I want you all back here in five minutes ready to leave. We're going away. Just pack some clothes. No arguments!" the beefy man exclaimed.

He looked so dangerous with half his mustache missing that no one dared argue. Ten minutes later they had wrenched their way through the boarded-up doors and were in the car, speeding toward the highway. Hikosu was still half asleep with her head resting on Harry's shoulder and Dudley was sniffing in the back seat; his father had hit him round the head for holding them up while he tried to pack his television, VCR, and computer in his sports bag. Harry and Hikosu were able to share a bag.

They drove. And they drove. Even Aunt Petunia didn't dare ask where they were going. Every now and then Uncle Vernon would take a sharp turn and drive in the opposite direction for a while.

"Shake 'em off...shake 'em off," he would mutter whenever he did this.

They didn't stop to eat or drink all day. By nightfall Dudley was howling. He'd never had such a bad day in his life. He was hungry, he'd missed five television programs he'd wanted to see, and he'd never gone so long without blowing up an alien on his computer.

Uncle Vernon stopped at last outside a gloomy-looking hotel on the outskirts of a big city. Dudley and Harry shared a room with Hikosu; Harry slept on the couch while Dudley and Hikosu slept on the beds. Dudley snored, but Harry stayed awake, sitting on the windowsill, staring down at the lights of passing cars and wondering...

Once again Hikosu couldn't sleep. She had a nightmare about a big white wolf and a dark hared man...the same man whose picture was in her locket. Harry was definitely beginning to worry about her.

In the morning they ate stale cornflakes and cold tinned tomatoes on toast for breakfast. They had just finished when the owner of the hotel came over to their table.

"Scuse me, but is one of you Mr. H. Potter? And is one of you Ladies Miss H. Snape? Only I got about an 'undred of these for each at the front desk." She held up two letters so they could read the green ink addresses:

Mr. H Potter

Room 17

Railview Hotel

Cokeworth

Was the address on Harry's letter. Hikosu's was the same except it had her name on it. Harry made a grab for the letter, but Uncle Vernon knocked his hand out of the way. The woman stared.

"I'll take them," said Uncle Vernon, standing up quickly and following her from the dining room.

"Wouldn't it be better just to go home, dear?" Aunt Petunia suggested timidly, hours later, but Uncle Vernon didn't seem to hear her. Exactly what he was looking for, none of them knew. He drove them into the middle of a forest, got out, looked around, shook his head, got back in the car, and off they went again. The same thing happened in the middle of a plowed field, halfway across a suspension bridge, and at the top of a multilevel parking garage.

"Daddy's gone mad, hasn't he?" Dudley asked Aunt Petunia dully late that afternoon. Uncle Vernon had parked at the coast, locked them all inside the car, and disappeared.

W-what was his f-first clue? Vernon's always b-been a bit mad. Hikosu weakly said in his mind. She had been so exhausted because of her dreams; waking up in the middle of the night and not being able go to back to sleep.

"Go to sleep, Hikosu. Please? I'm worried about you..." Harry whispered as he wrapped an arm around her waist. She wrapped both of hers around Harry's waist as she rested her head in his lap. He started to pet her hair as her eyes fluttered shut. It started to rain. Great drops beat on the roof of the car. Dudley sniveled.

"It's Monday," he told his mother. "The Great Humberto's on tonight. I want to stay somewhere with a television."

Monday. This reminded Harry of something. If it was Monday – and you could usually count on Dudley to know the days of the week, because of television – then tomorrow, Tuesday, was Harry's eleventh birthday. Of course, his birthdays were never exactly fun – last year, the Dursleys had given him a coat hanger and a pair of Uncle Vernon's old socks. Still, you weren't eleven every day. Hikosu usually spent the day with him, making him feel loved.

Uncle Vernon was back and he was smiling. He was also carrying a long, thin package and didn't answer Aunt Petunia when she asked what he'd bought.

"Found the perfect place!" he said. "Come on! Everyone out!"

It was very cold outside the car. Uncle Vernon was pointing at what looked like a large rock way out at sea. Perched on top of the rock was the most miserable little shack you could imagine. One thing was certain; there was no television in there.

"Storm forecast for tonight!" said Uncle Vernon gleefully, clapping his hands together. "And this gentleman's kindly agreed to lend us his boat!"

A toothless old man came ambling up to them, pointing, with a rather wicked grin, at an old rowboat bobbling in the iron-gray water below them.

"I've already got us some rations," said the beefy male, "so all aboard!"

It was freezing in the boat. Icy sea spray and rain crept down their necks and a chilly wind whipped their faces. After what seemed like hours they reached the rock, where Uncle Vernon, slipping and sliding, led the way to the broken-down house.

The inside was horrible; it smelled strongly of seaweed, the wind whistled through the gaps in the wooden walls, and the fireplace was damp and empty. There were only two rooms.

Uncle Vernon's rations turned out to be a bag of chips each and five bananas. He tried to start a fire but the empty chip bags just smoked and shriveled up.

"Could do with some of those letters now, eh?" he said cheerfully. He was in a very good mood. Obviously he thought nobody stood a chance of reaching them here in a storm to deliver mail. Harry privately agreed, though the thought didn't cheer him up at all.

As night fell, the promised storm blew up around them. Spray from the high waves splattered the walls of the hut and a fierce wind rattled the filthy windows. Aunt Petunia found a few moldy blankets in the second room and made up a bed for Dudley on the moth-eaten sofa. She and Uncle Vernon went off to the lumpy bed next door, and Harry and Hikosu were left to find the softest bit of floor they could and to curl up under the thinnest, most ragged blanket.

Harry was worried that his best friend wouldn't be able to sleep once again. He wrapped his arms around her, letting her use his arm as a pillow, but he could tell it wasn't working. Her eyes were flashing between silver and grey due to her exhaustion and bags were forming under her eyes.

The storm raged more and more ferociously as the night went on. Harry and Hikosu shivered and changed positions as they tried to get comfortable. Their stomachs were rumbling with hunger. Dudley's snores were drowned by the low rolls of thunder that

started near midnight. The lighted dial of Dudley's wristwatch, which was dangling over the edge of the sofa on his fat wrist, told Harry he'd be eleven in ten minutes' time. He lay and watched his birthday tick nearer, happy that Hikosu had finally fallen asleep with her head nestled against his chest. He wondered if the Dursleys would remember at all – Hikosu would, she always did – wondering where the letter writer was now.

Five minutes to go. Harry heard something creak outside. He hoped the roof wasn't going to fall in, although he might be warmer if it did. Four minutes to go. Maybe the house in Privet Drive would be so full of letters when they got back that he'd be able to seal one somehow.

Three minutes to go. Was that the sea, slapping hard on the rock like that? And (two minutes to go) what was that funny crunching noise? Was the rock crumbling into the sea?

One minute to go and he'd be eleven. Thirty seconds...twenty...ten...nine – maybe he'd wake Dudley up, just to annoy him – three...two...one...

**BOOM**

The whole shack shivered and Harry sat bolt upright, violently waking up Hikosu in the process, as he stared at the door.

Someone was outside, knocking to come in.

Hey, guys! This chapter explains a little more about the drawbacks of being an Animalia. Hope you enjoy!

Disclaimer: Anything you recognize belongs to JK Rowling. I own Hikosu, Arista, Cael, and Epsis.

Thanks to:

TwilightEclps - Lol here's you're more!

Raine44354 - Lol, yeah she has purple hair. I'm thinking about making her eye completely silver when she drinks from the Animalia Life Spring.

Thanks again!

## Chapter Four

### The Keeper of the Keys and Another Unexpected Guest

BOOM!

Whoever was knocking pounded on the door again. Dudley jerked awake.

"Where's the cannon?" he said stupidly.

Where's his brain? Oh wait. That's right. He never had one. Hikosu sarcastically commented with a tired look on her face. She was absently rubbing a spot on the back of her head where she hit the floor when Harry jumped up.

There was a great crash behind them and Uncle Vernon came skidding into the room. He was holding a rifle in his hands – now they knew what had been in the long, thin package he had brought with them.

"Who's there?" he shouted – or more like squeaked. "I warn you – I'm armed!"

There was a pause, a muffled grunt, and then...

SMASH!



The door was hit with such force that it swung clean off its hinges and with a deafening crash landed flat on the floor.

A giant of a man was standing in the doorway. His face was almost completely hidden by a long, shaggy mane of hair and a wild, tangled beard, but you could make out his eyes, glinting like black beetles under all the hair.

Oh...my...word. The stormy grey eyed girl whispered into Harry's mind. He was pretty much affected the same except he didn't say anything. Suddenly, scrambled to his feet and pulled Hikosu up beside him, pushing her back so that she had to look over his shoulder.

The giant squeezed his way into the hut, stooping so that his head just brushed the ceiling. He bent down, picked up the door, and fitted it easily back into its frame. The noise of the storm outside dropped a little, but not much. Then, the great beast of a man turned to look at them all.

"Couldn't make us a cup o' tea, could yeh? It's not been an easy journey...." He strode over to the sofa where Dudley sat frozen with fear. Harry could feel Hikosu relaxing behind him and started to relax himself. She was usually a good judgment of character, but sometimes she can be too curious for her own good.

"Budge up, yeh great lump." Said the stranger. Harry couldn't help but snort; maybe he wasn't so bad after all. Dudley squeaked and ran to hide behind his mother, who was crouching, terrified, behind Uncle Vernon.

"An' here's Harry!" said the giant. Hikosu stifled a silent giggle, but she stopped when the emerald eyed boy grasped her hand. He looked up into the fierce, wild, shadowy face and saw that the beetle eyes were crinkled in a smile.

"Las' time I saw you, you was only a baby," said the giant. "Yeh look a lot like yer dad, but yeh've got yer mom's eyes."

Uncle Vernon made a funny rasping noise.

"I demand that you leave at once, sir!" he said, "You are breaking and entering!"

"Ah, shut up, Dursley, yeh great prune," said the giant; he reached over the back of the sofa, jerked the gun out of Uncle Vernon's hands, bent it into a knot as easily as if it had been made of rubber, and threw it into a corner of the room. Bell chimes echoed through the room as Hikosu laughed. Harry smirked over his shoulder at her as the giant finally spotted the stormy grey eyed girl.

"Blimy – is that lil' Hikosu? Why, you was a baby last time I saw you, too! Though, you had some mighty pretty purple hair then. Yer dad's worried about you. Wants to see you, he does." Hikosu gasped, mind reeling from the information the giant reveled.

Uncle Vernon made another funny noise, like a mouse being troddon on.

"Anyway – Harry," said the giant, turning his back on the Dursleys, "a very happy birthday to yeh. Got summat fer yeh here – I mighta sat on it at some point, but it'll taste all right."

That's right. Happy birthday, Harry. Hikosu said, brushing her lips over Harry's cheek. He blushed lightly but it drew a great laugh from the giant of a man. From an inside pocket of his black overcoat he pulled a slightly squashed box. Harry opened it with trembling fingers. Inside was a large, sticky chocolate cake with Happy Birthday Harry written on it in green icing.

"I da make you one, too, Hikosu on a countin' yer birthday is tomorra, but I coulnt fit it in meh coat." The stormy grey eyed girl only shook her head and supplied him with a small smile.

Could you tell him that it's okay, Harry? She asked and Harry relayed the message. The room stared at him; it was the first time he had relayed the message for her before.

Harry looked between his cake and the giant. He meant to say thank you, but the words got lost on the way to his mouth, and what he said instead was, "Who are you?"

The giant chuckled.

"True. I haven't introduced meself. Rubeus Hagrid, Keeper of Keys and Grounds at Hogwarts." He held out an enormous hand and shook Harry's whole arm. The gentle sound of bells chimed again, alerting everyone that Hikosu was laughing again.

"What about that tea then, eh?" he Hagrid said, rubbing his hands together. "I'd not say no ter summat stronger of yeh've got it, mind."

Hagrid's eyes fell on the empty grate with the shriveled chip bags in it and he snorted. He bent down over the fireplace; they couldn't see what he was doing but when he drew back a second later, there was a roaring fire there. It filled the whole damp hut with flickering light and Harry felt the warmth wash over him as though he'd sunk into a hot bath. He could tell that his best friend felt the same for she leaned against his back and yawned. It was a good sign; she needed to get some sleep.

The giant sat back down on the sofa, which sagged under his weight, and began taking all sorts of things out of the pockets of his coat: a copper kettle, a squashy bag of sausages, a poker, a teapot, several chipped mugs, and a bottle of some amber liquid that he took a swig from before starting to make tea. Soon the hut was full of the sound and smell of sizzling sausage. Nobody said a thing while the giant was working, but as he slid the first six fat, juicy, slightly burnt sausages from the poker, Dudley fidgeted a little. Uncle Vernon said sharply, "Don't touch anything he gives you, Dudley."

The giant chuckled darkly.

I like this guy, Harry. He seems nice. Hikosu faintly remarked as she started blinking rapidly.

"Yer great puddin' of a son don' need fattenin' anymore, Dursley, don' worry." He passed the sausages to Harry and Hikosu, who were both so hungry they had never tasted anything so wonderful. Hikosu actually almost fell asleep while eating, but she had the emerald eyed boy to gently wake her up and make sure she ate. Only when she was finished did he eat. Both of the children couldn't take their eyes of the giant.

Finally, as nobody seemed about to explain anything, Harry said, "I'm sorry, but I still don't really know who you are."

The giant took a gulp of tea and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

"Call me Hagrid," the giant said, "everyone does. An' like I told yeh, I'm Keeper of Keys at Hogwards – yeh'll know all about Howgarts, o'course."

Hogwarts? What in God's name is a Hogwarts, Harry? The stormy grey eyed girl could barely keep her eyes open so the emerald eyed boy just shushed her and told her to go to sleep. She complied, laying her head in his lap as he looked back up at the giant.

"Er-no," said Harry. Hagrid looked shocked and then looked like he was going to be ill.

"Sorry," Harry said quickly in response to Hagrid's expression.

"Sorry?" barked Hagrid, turning to stare at the Dursleys, who shrank back into the shadows. "It's them as should be sorry! I know yeh two weren't gettin' yer letters but I never though yeh wouldn't even know abou' Hogwarts, fer cryin' out loud! Did yeh never wonder where yer parents learned it all?"

"All what?" asked Harry.

"ALL WHAT?" Hagrid thundered, consequently waking the sleeping girl again. She began to whine softly, but since she was mute nobody heard her except for Harry.

Harry...I'm so tired, but I can't sleep...I don't think I can take it anymore... the stormy grey eyed girl whimpered, tearing up.

"Hagrid...could you maybe...lower your voice a little? Hikosu's been having trouble sleeping and she needs her sleep." Harry quietly asked. It wasn't like he was afraid of the giant...he just wasn't fond of being squished. Hagrid spared him a worried glance and a nod, but continued to whisper-yell at the Dursleys.

"Now wait jus' one second!" the giant had leapt to his feet. In his anger he seemed to fill the whole hut. The Dursleys were cowering against the wall.

"Do you mean ter tell me," He growled at the Dursleys, "that these kids – these kids! – knows nothin' abou' – about ANYTHING?" Hagrid had accidentally yelled the last word.

Harry was relieved that Hikosu had slipped back into quiet slumber, but he also thought that this was going a bit far. He had been to school, after all, and his marks weren't bad.

"I know some things," he said. "I can, you know, do math and stuff."

But Hagrid simply waved his hand and said "About our world, I mean. My world. Yer and Hikosu's world. Yer parents' and her da's world."

"What world?"

Hagrid looked as if he was about to explode.

"DURSLEY!" he boomed, consequently waking Hikosu again. This time, however, it was a sure thing that she wasn't going to be falling back asleep. Instead she just lied there with her head still in Harry's lap with his hand running through his hair. Her hand was intertwined with his free hand.

Uncle Vernon, who had gone very pale, whisered something that sounded like "Mimblewimble." Hagrid stared wildly at Harry and Hikosu.

"But yeh must know about yer mum and dad...an'- an' Professor Snape, to!" he said. "I mean, they're famous. You two are famous!"

"What? My – mum and dad weren't famous, were they?"

Wait, did he just say that my dad was a Professor? Hikosu asked Harry, tired and bloodshot eyes turning a bright hue of silver.

"Yeh don' know...yeh don' know..." Hagrid ran his fingers through his hair, fixing the two children with a bewildered stare. He didn't even seem to mind that Hikosu's eyes were now bright silver and currently fixed upon him.

"Yeh don' know what yeh are?" he said finally.

Uncle Vernon suddenly found his voice.

"Stop!" he commanded. "Stop right there, sir! I forbid you to tell the two of them anything!" a braver man than Vernon Dursley would have quailed under the furious look Hagrid now gave him; when Hagrid spoke, his every syllable trembled with rage.

"You never told him? Never told him what was in the letter Dumbledore left for him? What about Hikosu? Never told her what she was? That her kind is so rare in the magical world that there are less than a thousand scattered all across the world? Never told her why she was staying with you when her father – her father! – wasn't allowed to have her? I was there! I saw Dumbledore leave the letter, Dursley! An' you've kept it from them all these years?" Hagrid's accent disappeared with his rage.

Harry looked down at the girl in his lap with excited emerald eyes. What had the Dursleys been keeping from them?

"Kept what from us? Said Harry eagerly.

"STOP! I FORBID YOU!" yelled Uncle Vernon in panic. Aunt Petunia gave a gasp of horror.

"Ah, go boil yer heads, both of yeh," said Hagrid. "Harry – yer a wizard. Hikosu – yer an Animalia...and a witch too if yeh want ter be. Dumbledore did send yeh a letter after all."

What...in the seven levels of hell...is an Animalia? I know what a witch and a wizard are... but an Animalia? Never heard of it. Wait! Maybe that's why I can talk to animals! Sudden realization hit the normally stormy grey eyed girl and her currently silver color eyes glowed even brighter.

There was silence inside the hut. Pure silence. Only the sea and the whistling wind could be heard.

"I'm a what?" gasped Harry.

I believe he called you a wizard. All in all that sounds much cooler than a witch. I don't think I look all gross and pimply, do I? And I still don't know what an Animalia is. Hikosu commented as she silently yawned.

"A wizard, o' course, and Hikosu is a witch and an Animalia. Dun know exactly what that is, but Arista'll be comin' in the mornin' ter help with that problem." Said Hagrid, sitting back down on the sofa, which groaned and sank even lower, "An' you two are thumpin' good'uns, I'd say. Once yeh've been trained up a bit. With a mum an' dad like yours, what else would yeh be? An' Hikosu. Yer dad's the greatest Potions Master in the UK, I'd wager. An' I reckon it's abou' time yeh read yer letter. Sorry, mate, I've only got 'un fer Harry. I mighta lost yers, Hikosu."

Harry stretched out his hand at last to take the yellowish envelope, addressed in emerald green to Mr. H. Potter, The Floor, Hut-on-the-Rock, The Sea. He pulled out the letter and read:

HOGWARTS SCHOOL

of WITCHCRAFT and WIZARDRY

Headmaster: Albus Dumbledore

(Order of Merlin, First Class, Grand Sorc., Chf. Warlock,

Supreme Mugwump, International Confed. of Wizards)

Dear Mr. Potter,

We are pleased to inform you that you have been accepted at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

Please find enclosed a list of all necessary books and equipment.

Term begins on September 1. We await your owl by no later than July 31.

Yours sincerely,

Minerva McGonagall,

Deputy Headmistress

Both Harry and Hikosu were speechless. Questions exploded inside Harry's head like fireworks and he couldn't decide which to ask first.

After a few minutes he stammered, "What does it mean, they await my owl?"

"Gallopin' Gorgons, that reminds me," said Hagrid, clapping a hand to his forehead with enough force to knock over a cart horse, and from yet another pocket inside his overcoat he pulled an owl – a real, live, rather ruffled looking owl – a long quill, and a roll of parchment. With his tongue between his teeth he scribbled a note that Harry could read upside down.

Dear Professor Dumbledore,

Given Harry his letter. Hikosu is with him.

Taking him to buy his things tomorrow.

Arista will arrive in the morning.

She'll take Hikosu to the Animalia Life Spring.

We'll meet up at Diagon Alley.

Weather's horrible. Hope you're well.

Hagrid.

Hagrid rolled up the note, gave it to the owl, which clamped it in its beak, went to the door, and threw the owl out into the storm. Then he came back and sat down as though this was as normal as talking on the telephone. Harry realized his mouth was open and closed it quickly.

"Where was I?" said Hagrid, but at that moment, Uncle Vernon, still ashen-faced but looking very angry, moved into the firelight.

"They're not going," he said.

Hagrid grunted in obvious annoyance.

"I'd like ter see a great Muggle like you stop them," he said, "Besides. I dun think Arista'd like for you ter try ter keep Hikosu from goin' to the Animalia Life Spring."



"A what?" said Harry, interested. Both of the children were interested.

"A Mubble," said Hagrid, "it's what we call nonmagic folk like them. an' it's your bad luck you two grew up in a family o' the biggest Muggles I ever laid eyes on."

"And the...Animalia Life Spring?" Harry pressed as Hikosu's grip on his hand tightened a fraction.

"I dun know the specifics, but Hikosu needs to go to the Animalia Life Spring – the source of an Animalia's magic - and drink the water. The dreams'll stop – from what Arista said – an' her magic'll start to develop more. And then at thirteen...ah I better let Arista 'splain all that to yah."

"We swore when we took him in we'd put a stop to that rubbish," said Uncle Vernon, "swore we'd stamp it out of him! Wizard indeed! And that little brat! She's not human! She's more of a freak than the boy!"

"You knew?" said Harry. "You knew I'm a – a wizard?"

"Knew!" shrieked Aunt Petunia suddenly. "Knew! Of course we knew! How could you not be, my dratted sister being what she was? Oh, she got a letter just like that and disappeared off to that – that school – and came home every vacation with her pocket full of frog spawn, turning teacups into rats. I was the only one who saw her for what she was – a freak! But for my mother and father, oh no, it was Lily this and Lily that, they were so proud of having a witch in the family!"

She stopped to draw a deep breath and then went ranting on. It seemed she had wanted to say all this for years.

"Then she met that Potter at school and they left and got married and had you, and of course I knew you'd be just the same, just as strange, just as – as – abnormal – and then, if you please, she went and got herself blown up and we got landed with you! And if it wasn't bad enough we also had to take in that brat of a girl! We tried to make her normal – gave her a normal name – but she's just as much a freak as you are!"

Harry had gone very white. Hikosu was whimpering in his mind again and his heart had suddenly gone very cold for several reasons. Petunia had caused Hikosu pain and he couldn't stand her being in any sort of pain...and she had just insulted his mother. As soon as he found his voice he said, "Blown up? You told me she died in a car crash!"

"CAR CRASH!" roared Hagrid, jumping up so angrily that the Dursleys scuttled back to their corner. "How could a car crash kill Lily Potter? James gone missin' is bad enough, but to accuse her of bein' killed in a car crash? It's an outrage! A scandal! Harry Potter and Hikosu Snape not knowin' their own stories when every kid in our world knows their names!"

"But why? What happened?" Harry asked urgently. The girl who was laying in his lap had started trembling, but he couldn't tell if it was because she was tired, crying, or if something else was wrong.

The anger faded from Hagrid's face. He looked suddenly anxious.

"I never expected this," he said in a low, worried voice. "I had no idea, when Dumbledore told me there might be trouble getting' hold of yeh – but someone's gotta – yeh can't go off ter Hogwarts not knowin'." He threw a dirty look at the Dursleys.

"Well, it's best yeh know as much as I can tell yeh – mind, I can't tell yeh everythin', it's a great myst'ry, parts of it..."

He sat down, stared into the fire for a few seconds, and then said, "It begins, I suppose, with – with a person called – but it's incredible yeh don't know his name, everyone in our world knows –"

"Who?"

"Well – I don' like sayin' the name if I can help it. No one does"

"Why not?" Hikosu had been quiet through the whole exchange, but the soft feeling of her simple presence in Harry's mind reassured him that she was still awake and alright.

"Gulpin' gargoyles, Harry, people are still scared. Blimey, this is difficult. See, there was this wizrd who went...bad. As bad as you

could go. Worse. Worse than worse. His name was..." Hagrid gulped, but no words came out.

"Could you write it down?" Harry suggested.

"Nah – can't spell it. All right – Voldemort." Hagrid shuddered. "Don' make me say it again. Anyway, this – this wizard, about twenty years ago now, started lookin' fer followers. Got 'em, too – some were afraid, some just wanted a bit o' his power, 'cause he was getting' himself power, all right. Dark days, Harry. Didn't know who ter' trust, didn't dare get friendly with strange wizards or witches...terrible things happened. He was takin' over. 'Course, some stood up to him – an' he killed 'em. Horribly. One o' the only safe places left was Hogwarts. Reckon Dumbledore's the only one You-Know-Who was afraid of. Didn't dare try takin' the school, not jus' then, anyway."

Hagrid trailed off as he reminisced before shaking his head and continuing his story.

"Now, yer mum an' dad were as good a witch an' wizard as I ever knew. Head boy an' girl at Hogwarts in their day! Suppose the myst'ry is why You-Know-Who never tried to get 'em on his side before...probably knew they were too close ter Dumbledore ter want anythin' ter do with the Dark Side..."

Here he reminisced once again, but before he could go too far he shook his head again and finished his story.

"Maybe he thought he could persuade 'em...maybe he just wanted 'em outta the way. All anyone knows is, he turned up in the village where you was all living – including Professor Snape and Hikosu, they lived down the street, despite his obvious dislike of yer dad – on Halloween ten years ago. You was just a year old. He came ter yer house an' – an' –" Hagrid suddenly pulled out a very dirty, spotted handkerchief and blew his nose with a sound like a foghorn.

"Sorry," he said. "But it's that sad – knew yer mum an' dad, an' nicer people yeh couldn't find – anywhere..."

"You-Know-Who killed 'em. An' then – an' this is the real myst'ry of the thing – he tried to kill you, too. And Hikosu. Wanted ter make a clean job of it, I suppose, or maybe he just liked killin' by then. But

he couldn't do it. Never wondered how you two got that mark on yer foreheads? That was no ordinary cut for either of yeh. That's what yeh get when a powerful, evil curse touches yeh – took care of yer mum an' we dun know where yer dad is, an' yer house, even – but it didn't work on you, an' that's why yer famous, Harry. No one ever lived after he decided ter kill 'em, no one except you and Hikosu, an' he'd killed some o' the best witches an' wizards of the age – the McKinnons, the Bones, the Prewetts – an' you two was only babies, an' you lived..." Hagrid finally trailed off after his long speech.

Something very painful was going on in Harry's mind. As Hagrid's story came to a close, he saw again the blinding flash of green light, more clearly than he had ever remembered it before – and he remembered something else, for the first time in his life: a high, cold, cruel laugh. Hikosu shivered on his lap and he squeezed her hand in reassurance. He looked down with a worried frown; her eyes were still glowing silver...but she looked so tired.

Hagrid was watching them sadly.

"Took yeh from the ruined house myself, on Dumbledore's orders. Brought yeh ter this lot...but Arista took Hikosu ter get her mark first. The one on her throat...and...Blimey! Hikosu, what happened ter yer hair? I coulda sworn it was a purple color when you was a baby." And with that he blinked owlishly, looking at them harder than before. It was easy enough to see that the two of them cared for one another.

"Load of old tosh," said Uncle Vernon. Harry jumped; he had almost forgotten that the Dursleys were there. Uncle Vernon certainly seemed to have got back his courage. He was glaring at all three of them with his fists clenched.

"Now, you listen here, boy," he snarled, "I accept there's something strange about you and your little girlfriend – or whatever she is – probably nothing a good beating would have cured – and as for all this about your parents, well, they were weirdos, no denying it, and the world's better off without them in my opinion – asked for all they got, getting mixed up with these wizarding types – just what I expected, always knew they'd come to a sticky end –"

But at that moment, Hagrid leapt from the sofa and drew a battered pink umbrella from inside his coat. Pointing this at Uncle Vernon like

a sword, he said, "I'm warning you, Dursley – I'm warning you – one more word..."

In danger of being speared on the end of an umbrella by a bearded giant, Uncle Vernon's courage failed again; he flattened himself against the wall and fell silent.

"That's better," said Hagrid, breathing heavily and sitting back down on the sofa, which this time sagged right down to the floor.

Harry, meanwhile, still had questions to ask, hundreds of them.

"But what happened to Vol-, sorry – I mean, You-Know-Who?"

"Good question, Harry. Disappeared. Vanished. Same night he tried ter kill you an' Hikosu. Makes yeh even more famous. That's the biggest myst'ry, see...he was getting' more an' more powerful – why'd he go?"

"Some say he died. Codswallop, in my opinion. Dunno if he had enough human left in him to die. Some say he's still out there, bidin' his time, like, but I don' believe it. People who was on his side came back ter ours. Some of 'em came outta kinda trances. Don' reckon they could've done if he was comin' back.

"Most of us reckon he's still out there somewhere but lost his powers. Too weak to carry on. 'Cause somethin' about you two finished him, Harry...Hikosu. There was somethin' goin' on that night he hadn't counted on – I dunno what it was, no one does – but somethin' about you stumped him, all right."

Hagrid looked at Harry with warmth and respect blazing in his eyes, but Harry, instead of feeling pleased and proud, felt quite sure there had been a horrible mistake. A wizard? Him? How could he possibly be? He'd spent his life being clouted by Dudley, and bullied by Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon; if he was really a wizard, why hadn't they been turned into warty toads every time they'd tried to lock him in his cupboard? If he'd once defeated the greatest sorcerer in the world, howe come Dudley had always been able to kick him around like a football?

Harry...don't doubt yourself. I don't think that I'm a witch...but this Animalia stuff. It even has 'animal' in the name. Why else can I

Speak to animals? It doesn't make sense, but it's the only thing we have to work with. Hikosu whispered in his mind. Even the voice in his head was becoming weak. He wasn't worried too much about her now, but if she wasn't better in the morning...well, later in the morning when they woke up, then he would start to panic.

"Hagrid," he said quietly, "I think you must have made a mistake. I don't think I can be a wizard." To his surprise, Hagrid chuckled.

"Not a wizard, eh? Never made things happen when you was scared or angry?"

Harry looked into the fire, feeling Hikosu's 'gentle nudging' in his mind. It was like a hug in his head...sort of. As of late he could feel the barest traces of her emotions. If she was scared or angry. She couldn't feel his, which was weird, but they were still closer than ever.

Now he came to think about it...every odd thing that had ever made his aunt and uncle furious with him had happened when he, Harry, had been upset or angry...chased by Dudley's gang, he had somehow found himself out of their reach. The same thing happened to Hikosu...something inexplicable. When he dreaded going to school with that ridiculous haircut, he'd managed to make it grow back...and the very last time Dudley had hit him, hadn't he set a boa constrictor on him?

Harry looked back at Hagrid, smiling, and saw that Hagrid was positively beaming at him.

"See?" said Hagrid. "Harry Potter, not a wizard – you wait, you'll be right famous at Hogwarts along with lil Hikosu."

I'm not little! Gah, why does everyone always call me little? Harry could feel traces of frustration and annoyance as she said the words. Perhaps he'd have a chance to ask an adult witch or wizard why he could do these things.

But Uncle Vernon wasn't going to give in without a fight.

"Haven't I told you they're not going?" he hissed. "They're going to Stonewall High and they'll be grateful for it. I've read those letters and they need all sorts of rubbish – spell books and wands and –"

"If they want to go, a great Muggle like you won't stop them. Especially when Arista comes to take Hikosu to the Animalia Life Spring to meet with Cael. She's gone too long without the Life Spring's magic – s' why she's so weak." Growled Hagrid. "Stop Lily an' James Potter's son goin' ter Hogwarts! An' Professor Snape's daughter! Why I wouldn't be surprised if he came hisself and got 'er! Yer mad. They're name's been down ever since they was born. They're off ter the finest school of witchcraft and wizardry in the world. Seven years there and they won't know themselves. He'll be with youngsters of his own sort, fer a change, and Hikosu'll be right there with him! They'll be under the greatest headmaster Hogwarts ever had, Albus Dumbledore."

"I AM NOT PAYING FOR SOE CRACKPOT OLD FOOL TO TEACH THEM MAGIC TRICKS!" yelled Uncle Vernon. But he had finally gone too far. Hagrid seized his umbrella and whirled it over his head.

"NEVER-" he thundered, "-INSULT-ALBUS-DUMBLEDORE-IN-FRONT-OF-ME!"

He brought the umbrella swishing down through the air to point at Dudley – there was a flash of violet light, a sound like a firecracker, a sharp squeal, and the next second, Dudley was dancing on the spot with his hands clasped over his fat bottom, howling in pain. When he turned his back on them, Harry saw a curly pig's tail poking through a hole in his trousers.

Uncle Vernon roared. Pulling Aunt Petunia and Dudley into the other room, he cast one last terrified look at Hagrid and slammed the door behind them.

Hagrid looked down at his umbrella and stroked his beard.

"Shouldn'ta lost me temper," he said ruefully, "but it didn't work anyway. Meant ter turn him into a pig, but I suppose he was so much like a pig anyway there wasn't much left ter do."

Harry looked down at Hikosu, fully expecting her to be laughing, but when he saw her limp hand and glazed over eyes he knew something was wrong. Her breathing was labored and a light sweat was building on her head.

"Hagrid, what's wrong with her?" Harry asked, terrified. He didn't know what was wrong with her.

"Like I said before...Hikosu needs the water of the Animalia Life Spring. I dun know much, but when Arista explained it this is the gist that I got. An Animalia needs ter drink from the Life Spring once a year or their magical powers build up. Or summat like that. Hikosu's only drank once in her life so she's got almost ten years built up. She needs ter drink before her eleventh birthday or she could stand a chance of...of..." Hagrid looked down and Harry's heart almost literally froze.

"Hagrid? Stand a chance of what?" Harry frantically asked, squeezing Hikosu's hand reassuringly.

"Of...dyin'." And Harry's heart almost froze over.

"But dun worry. Arista's comin' ta take 'er to the Life Spring. After that she'll hafta drink once a day fer the next three years or summat like that. Ye'll havfta ask Arista the details."

He cast a sideways look at Harry under his bushy eyebrows after he thought a bit.

"Be grateful if yeh didn't mention that ter anyone at Hogwarts...what happened wit yer cousin 'n all." He said. "I'm – er – not supposed ter do magic, strictly speakin'. I was allowed ter do a bit ter follow yeh an' get yer letters to yeh an' stuff – one o' the reasons I was so keen ter take on the job –"

"Why aren't you supposed to do magic?" asked Harry.

"Oh, well – I was at Hogwarts meself but I – er – got expelled, ter tell yeh the truth. In me third year. They snapped me wand in half an' everything. But Dumbledore let me stay on as gamekeeper. Great man, Dumbledore."

"Why were you expelled?"

"It's getting' late and we've got lots ter do tomorrow," said Hagrid loudly. "Gotta get up ter town, get all yer books an' that. We'll meet Hikosu at Diagon Alley."



He took off his thick black coat and threw it to Harry.

"You can kip under that," Hagrid said. "Don' mind if it wriggles a bit, I think I still got a couple o' dormice in one o' the pockets."

With that Harry gently settled down and made sure that Hikosu was comfortable. She had started shivering in her sleep – yes she had finally gone to sleep – but he let her head rest upon his chest. He snuggled down against her and placed a kiss on her forehead before falling asleep himself.

Outside, in the rain, a rather disgruntled jaguar had landed on the rock. It had landed from mid air, seemingly appearing out of nowhere into the storm. Being a big cat, the jaguar hated getting wet. Her mistress was standing beside her as she looked upon the small hut.

Quietly they entered the hut, and the woman – identified as Arista – quickly wandered over to the two. It had been ten years since she had seen her little sibling. All Animalia were related in one way or another, but that is if they were born from the Earthen magic. There were few normal witches and wizards that were gifted with the sign of Animalia...like a certain wizard that was thought to be missing.

Arista looked down at the small Animalia with a worried expression etched onto her face. Her jaguar, whose name was Epsis, curled up around them while she did her best to keep the two children warm.

"Oh, dear Hikosu. Your condition is worse than I thought. We shall leave at first light – when the storm is gone and the sky is clear. Cael is most eager to meet you." and with that she shifted, turning into a spotted leopard. She curled up around the two as well, trying her best to keep them warm.

Arista's last thought was "I hope I wasn't too late."

Anything recognizable belongs to JK Rowling. I own Hikosu, Cael, Arista, and Epsis.

Thanks to:

Raine44354 - Really? I always want to do silver hair and amber eyes no matter what universe it is in. Weird, huh? But pretty. I went with the silver eyes, too XD

Twilight Eclps - Glad you like it!

Dammi forza - Review for chapter three, but my response shall be here...because I'm too lazy to put my response in chapter 4 for you to read lol. Anyway, beautiful pic! Exactly how I imagined her eyes.

## Chapter Five

### The Animalia Life Spring and Diagon Alley

Arista woke a short four hours later, perking her head up and nudging the panting girl's arm. She didn't move and that worried the older Animalia greatly. The magical buildup was becoming too much for the girl to handle and she could slip into a coma permanently...or if the magical buildup was powerful enough then her magical core would destroy itself and she would die. She had one day – today – to get Hikosu to the Animalia Life Spring or else...no, Arista didn't want to think about it.

She phased back into a humanoid, bright eyes blinking in the extremely early morning light. Epsis blinked up at her as soon as her mistress moved, but refrained from phasing into her humanoid mode.

The two main differences between animal guides and Animalia was that animal guides were born animals whereas Animalia were born human, and animal guides were to serve and protect their Animalia masters. Animal guides were able to phase into humanoids, but they still take on animal characteristics where the Animalia were able to phase into the animal that represents their soul. For Arista, her spotted leopard form represented that her soul was fierce and courageous.

Arista couldn't take Hikosu while Harry was still sleeping; he would have a conniption fit when he saw that she was gone. Instead, she just waited until the boy woke.

Harry woke several hours later in the morning. Although he could tell it was daylight, he kept his eyes shut tight. He could feel the weight of someone's head on his chest, but he was quite certain that it was only Hikosu. He could feel her very faintly in his mind...but something was wrong. She was scared...but that might have something to do with the dreams she had been suffering from.

"It was a dream," he told himself firmly, not daring to believe what he had witnessed was real. He thought that Hikosu was sleeping with him in the cupboard. "I dreamed a giant called Hagrid came to tell me that Hikosu and I were going to a school for wizards and witches. When I open my eyes I'll be at home in my cupboard."

There was suddenly a loud tapping noise

And there's Aunt Petunia knocking on the door, Harry thought, his heart sinking. But he still didn't open his eyes. It had been such a good dream.

Tap. Tap. Tap.

"All right," Harry mumbled, "I'm getting up."

He sat up with Hikosu still cradled in his arms and Hagrid's heavy coat fell off him. The hut was full of sunlight, the storm was over, Hagrid himself was asleep on the collapsed sofa, and there was an owl rapping its claw on the window, a newspaper held in its beak.

Harry gently set the sleeping girl down, not noticing that there was a strange person in the room let alone a jaguar. He was so happy he felt as though a large balloon was swelling inside him. He went straight to the window and jerked it open. The owl swooped in and dropped the newspaper on top of Hagrid, who didn't wake up. The owl then fluttered onto the floor and began to attack Hagrid's coat.

"Don't do that."

Harry tried to wave the owl out of the way, but it snapped its beak fiercely at him and carried on savaging the coat.

"Hagrid!" said Harry loudly. "There's an owl –"

"Pay him," Hagrid grunted into the sofa.

"What?"

"He wants payin' fer deliverin' the paper. Look in the pockets." Hagrid's coat seemed to be made of nothing but pockets – bunches of keys, slug pellets, balls of string, peppermint humbugs, teabags...finally, Harry pulled out a handful of strange-looking coins.

"Give him five Knuts," said Hagrid sleepily.

"Knuts?"

"The little bronze ones."

Harry counted out five little bronze coins, and the owl held out his leg so Harry could put the money into a small leather pouch tied to it. Then he flew off through the open window.

Hagrid yawned loudly, sat up, and stretched as he finally noticed Arista and her jaguar guardian crouched next to Hikosu.

"Sorry, though you'd might want to see to that. Since you're finally awake I have to take Hikosu, now." Arista commented as she picked the girl up. She was still shivering and the thin layer of sweat was still there, but now a raging fever had taken its place on her forehead. Harry couldn't help but worry as his emerald eyes raked over her form.

"Don't worry, Harry. I'll take good care of her." She said, cradling the girl to her chest. Harry, however, couldn't let her go without saying goodbye so he quickly went up to Arista and wiped the light sheen of sweat away from Hikosu's forehead with his sleeve. Then, he gently kissed her on the forehead. T'was tradition for if one of them would leave then they would kiss each other on the forehead. Harry, though, liked to do it for other reasons as well.

When he finally backed away, Arista gave him one last sad smile before mounting her jaguar and disappearing with a loud CRACK.

When she was gone Hagrid yawned loudly, sat up, and stretched.

"Best be off, Harry, lots ter do today, gotta get up ter Londen an' buy all yer stuff fer school."

Harry was turning over the wizard coins and looking at them. he had just thought of something that made him feel as though the happy balloon inside him had got a puncture.

"Um-Hagrid?"

"Mm?" said Hagrid, who was pulling on his huge boots.

"I haven't got any money and Hikosu doesn't either. And you heard Uncle Vernon last night...he won't pay for us to go and learn magic."

"Don't worry about that," said Hagrid, standing up and scratching his head. "D'yeh think yer parents didn't leave yeh anything? Hikosu has one fer her as well."

"But if their house was destroyed –"

"They didn' keep their gold in the house, boy! Nah, first stop fer us is Gringotts. Wizards' bank. Have a sausage, they're not bad cold – an' I wouldn't say no the a bit o' yer birthday cake, neither."

"Wizards have banks?"

"Just the one. Gringotts. Run by goblins."

Harry dropped the bit of sausage he was holding.

"Goblins?"

"Yeah – so yeh'd be mad ter try an' rob it, I'll tell yeh that. Never mess with goblins, Harry. Gringotts is the safest place in the world fer anything yeh want ter keep safe – 'cept maybe Hogwarts. AS a matter o' fact, I gotta visit Gringotts anyway. Fer Dumbledore. Hogwarts business." Hagrid drew himself up proudly.

"He usually gets me ter do important stuff fer him. Fetchin' you – getting' things from Gringotts – knows he can trust me, see."

"Got everythin'? Come on, then."

Harry followed Hagrid out onto the rock. The sky was quite clear now and the sea gleamed in the sunlight. The boat Uncle Vernon had hired was still there, with a lot of water in the bottom after the storm.

"How did you get here?" Harry asked, looking around for another boat.

"Flew," said Hagrid.

"Flew?"

"Yeah – but we'll go back in this. Not s'posed ter use magic now I've got yeh." They settled down in the boat, Harry still staring at Hagrid, trying to imagine him flying.

"Seems a shame ter row, though," said Hagrid, giving Harry another of his sideways looks. "If I was ter – er – speed things up a bit, would yeh mind not mentionin' it at Hogwarts?"

"Of course not," said Harry, eager to see more magic. Hagrid pulled out the pink umbrella again, tapped it twice on the side of the boat, and they sped off toward land.

Meanwhile, Arista had appeared at the gate of the Animalia world. Most scientists of the modern world thought that it lead to a parallel dimension...or maybe it did. Magic – the true Earthen Magic – was unpredictable and anything could happen when it came down to it.

Where was this place of true divine magic? Well, it is famous for being a large circle of stones and nobody knows where or why it was created. It is located in Wiltshire and is commonly known for being a burial ground.

Guessed it yet? Its name is the Life Gate, where it leads to the magical land just for the Animalia. It was created centuries ago by the Earthen magic, but the Muggles never knew it was there. They know the Life Gate by its Muggle term – Stonehenge.

Arista was still riding Epsis, who was carefully treading towards one of the proudly standing stones, and allowed her to press her hand in

several intricate patterns on the stone. Then, in a clear voice, she stated who she was.

"I, Arista, the spotted leopard, an Animalia, hereby request to pass to the land of the Life Spring. I bring Epsis, the animal guide, and Hikosu, unnamed and un-phased Animalia." And with that the surface of the stone started to shimmer. Hikosu's eyes started to flutter as they literally stepped through the upright pillar of Stonehenge.

Once she, Epsis, and Hikosu were through the portal the pillar stopped shimmering, going back to its fluid stony surface. Arista looked down at the unconscious stormy grey eyed girl and sighed in worry. Epsis was sensing her mistress' worry and sped up, trotting through the wild foliage until they came upon a massive village filled with animals and people of all sorts. Several people waved to her, but the majority of them spared a worried glance at the girl in her arms.

There was one man sitting in the shadows with a cape over him. He was one of the few who were not born from the Earthen magic, but he was granted with the gift of the Animalia. Being so, he didn't possess the ability to shift, he needn't drink from the Animalia Life Spring, and he didn't have an animal guide, but he could talk to animals. He was an Animagi, however, and as such was still respected among them.

There are some who would confuse the power of an Animalia's shifting ability with that of an Animagi. Animagi are wizards and witches who use the magic of Transfiguration to change into one animal only, but if they weren't careful they could lose their sense of self. Animalia's shifting ability lets them shift into an animal, yes, but they can shift into any animal they chose until they reached the Animalia age of adulthood, twenty. Their most common one, and usually their first, form would be the one that represented their soul.

The man watched them with a sense of longing; he recognized the little girl in Arista's arms as Severus Snape's daughter. He had missed her growing up just as he missed his son's childhood. He felt bitter about it, but if he didn't drink from the Animalia Life Spring then he would have died. It was how he became an honorary Animalia, but then he couldn't leave until he was fully healed, which took

thirteen years. He wasn't able to leave just yet. He would be able to see his son when he started his third year at Hogwarts.

The Earthen Magic was able to purge the dark magic from his system, but nothing comes without a price. He had the mark of the Animalia on his forehead, ironically in the same spot where Hikosu had her scar. Since he was an honorary Animalia the effect was severely diluted, but that just meant that he needed his glasses now more than ever.

The Earthen Magic had given him a message that he was to meet up with an unexpected person. They would have to join forces in order to stop the Dark Lord from rising again.

Yes...James Potter needed to join forces with Severus Snape.

As he watched the little girl he could help but rise and go to her. He watched with worry etched deep into his eyes as Cael, a white wolf animal guide who was always nice to him, take Hikosu from Arista's arms. He looked down at her with tears in his eyes, but he looked the happiest he had been in his entire life.

It was the animal guide's job to protect their Animalia. Some go their entire lives without finding them and, like stated before, there can be multiple animal guides to a single Animalia. Cael had waited a long time – forty seven years in fact – and he was still considered a young animal guide. The Blessing of the Earthen Magic extends their lives by quite a bit.

Cael gently held his Animalia mistress and looked at her hair with disgusted eyes. How could someone dye her beautiful purple hair such a disgraceful color? As he walked through the cloister doors to the Path of Life he developed a determined expression. All of her questions would be answered and he would protect her with his life.

Forty five minutes later he arrived at the Animalia Life Spring and waded into the liquid that filled the spring. Now, most people would think that the spring would be filled with water, right? But they would be wrong. The Life Spring was not filled with water, but a silvery liquid substance that looked a bit like mercury...but more translucent. The liquid was the excess magic that seeped from the Earth. Some say it would be like liquid-magic, but in reality it was the essence of the Earthen Magic itself.



The spring would never run dry as long as there was magic still left in the Earth and since it was going strong it created the most powerful barriers in the world. It was the purest magic aside from the magics of old – like love, protection, and sacrifice. It was even older than dark magic. It was the magic of life.

Cael's wolfen ears twitched and his wolfen tail swished back and forth nervously as he slowly placed his charge in the liquid magic like substance. Her head tilted back and the brown seeped away, leaving her with her natural hair color – violet. Her eyebrows faded back to their natural color, too. The wolf animal guardian wasn't any different than he was ten years ago. His age had stilled in time until he was to pledge his protective services to Hikosu. His white hair was still the same and he was still wearing the same outfit he was ten years ago, but it hardly mattered. He was going to be in his wolf form for most of the time anyway.

He gently scooped up a handful of the liquid magic and watched with hopeful eyes as the magic trickled down her throat. He repeated the process until Hikosu stopped shivering. Slowly she opened her eyes; Cael was shocked at her eye color. They were not the stormy grey eyes she had as a baby. Instead they were the vibrant silver that a powerful Animalia possessed. He smiled brightly, ecstatic that he was to serve such a powerful Animalia.

"Hikosu? Are you alright? Don't be afraid to speak; the Animalia mark is nullified at the Life Spring." Cael whispered as her eyes darted around. Slowly they wandered towards him and widened. She must have been surprised because of his ears.

"W-who are you?" she asked, eyes widening drastically. She had spoken for the first time! Her voice was hoarse from years of disuse, but Cael didn't care. Slowly he lowered her into the water so that she was floating in his arms.

"I am Cael, your protector and animal guide. I have been waiting a long time to meet you, Hikosu." The white haired wolfen male whispered, hugging the stunned girl. Slowly she hugged back, feeling loved for the first time from someone other than Harry. It felt nice.

"Cael...I like it. Where are we?" she asked, trying out her voice for the second time. She looked around in curiosity, but she couldn't remember how she got there. The last thing she remembered was that she was sleeping on Harry's chest.

"We're in the Animalia Life Spring. I know you have a lot of questions, but we don't have much time if you want to meet up with your sou- I...uh...mean your friend, Harry." Cael stammered.

"What were you about to call him?" Hikosu asked, head curiously cocked to the side.

"I'll explain when you're older." Cael promised as he chuckled nervously. The silver eyed girl stared at him for a few moments before letting the subject drop.

"Alright, how can we meet up with Harry." She had begun feeling empty without him. He had been there her entire life and now that he wasn't...she was missing him horribly.

"We can meet up with Harry after you fill a few of these vials small with the Life Spring magic. Now that you've drunk from the Life Spring you should be alright, but you need to drink one vial every day for the next three years so that your magic doesn't build up like it did before. You were cut off from the life spring for so long you would have died without drinking." The wolfen male explained as they paddled back towards the shore of the Life Spring. Hikosu was surprised that her clothes were completely dry when they reached the shore, but she was even more surprised that Cael kneeled before her.

"I, Cael, promise to protect and guide you as your animal guide. Do you accept my oath?" Cael asked, staring into her bright silver eyes. Tears sprang forward as she gasped in awe. She nodded her head and a soft light surrounded them both.

Now, little one, we can read each other's thoughts. I thank you for accepting my oath for it is my dream to become the best animal guide I can be. Cael said as he morphed into a giant white wolf. Hikosu let out a little squeak as she realized it was the same wolf who had been watching her for the past few years.

"It was you!" she exclaimed as she flung her arms around Cael's neck.

Yes, little one. It was me. I couldn't reveal myself to you until the time was right and for that I apologize. Now, what do you say we meet up with your friend? Cael snorted as he crouched down, jerking his head as if giving her permission to get on his back. She did so, feeling the slightest bit awkward that she was riding on the back of a wolf. She emerged from the Life Spring to the Animalia village feeling refreshed amidst the cheers of her people and then, as Arista came forward to grab hold of her arm, all four of them slipped through the portal into Stonehenge.

Then, all four of them were gone with a loud CRACK.

Meanwhile, as Harry was still interrogating Hagrid about magic and Gringotts.

"Why would you be mad to try and rob Gringotts?" Harry asked.

"Spells – enchantments," said Hagrid, unfolding his newspaper as he spoke. "They say there's dragons guardin' the high security vaults. And then yeh gotta find yer way – Gringotts is hundreds of miles under London, see. Deep under the Underground. Yeh'd die of hunger tryin' ter get out, even if yeh did manage ter get yer hands on summat."

Harry sat and thought about this while Hagrid read his newspaper, the Daily Prophit. He was still feeling the effects of being away from Hikosu – he felt restless and worried for her. He wanted to be back by her side so that he would stop feeling like that, heck, he didn't even understand what he was feeling! He felt...empty.

Harry had learned from Uncle Vernon that people liked to be left alone while they did this, but it was very difficult, he'd never had so many questions in his life.

"Ministry o' Magic messin' things up as usual," Hagrid muttered, turning the page.

"There's a Ministry of Magic?" Harry asked, before he could stop himself.

"Course," said Hagrid. "They wanted Dumbledore for Minister, o' course, but he'd never leave Hogwarts, so old Cornelius Fudge got the job. Bungler if ever there was one. So he pelts Dumbledore with owls every morning, askin' fer advice."

"But what does a Ministry of Magic do?"

"Well, their main job is to keep it from the Muggles that there's still witches an' wizard up an' down the country. Especially Animalia 'cause they're almost pure magic in a human form."

"Why?"

"Why? Blimey, Harry, everyone'd be wantin' magic solutions to their problems and they'd most likely enslave the Animalia for their...er...zoos. Nah, we're best left alone." At this moment the boat bumped gently into the harbor wall. It was a while since they had left the island – Harry didn't know how much time had passed – and Hagrid folded his newspaper. They clambered up the stone steps to the street.

Passerby stared a lot at Hagrid as they walked through the little town to the station. Harry couldn't blame them. Not only was Hagrid twice as tall as anyone else, he kept pointing at perfectly ordinary things like parking meters and saying loudly, "See that, Harry? Things these Muggles dream up, eh?"

"Hagrid," said Harry, panting a bit as he ran to keep up, "did you say there are dragons at Gringotts?"

"Well, so they say," said Hagrid. "Crikey, I'd like a dragon."

"You'd like one?"

"Wanted one ever since I was a kid – here we go."

They had reached the station. There was a train to London in five minutes' time. Hagrid, who didn't understand Muggle money, as he called it, gave the bills to Harry so he could buy their tickets. People stared more than ever on the train. Hagrid took up two seats and sat knitting what looked like a canary-yellow circus tent.

"Still got yer letter, Harry?" he asked as he counted stitches. Harry took the parchment envelope out of his pocket.

"Good," said Hagrid. "There's a list there of everything yeh need." Harry unfolded a second piece of paper he hadn't noticed the night before and read:

## HOGWARTS SCHOOL

### Of WITCHCRAFT and WIZARDRY

#### Uniform

First-year students will require:

Three sets of plain work robes (black)

One plain pointed hat (black) for day wear

One pair of protective gloves (dragon hide or similar)

One winter cloak (black, silver fastenings)

Please note that all pupils' clothes should carry nametags.

#### Course Books

All students should have a copy of each of the following:

The Standard Book of Spells (Grade 1) by Miranda Goshawk

A History of Magic by Bathilda Bagshot

Magical Theory by Adalbert Waffling

A Beginners' Guide to Transfiguration by Emeric Switch

One Thousand Magical Herbs and Fungi by Phyllida Spore

Magical Drafts and Potions by Arsenius Jigger

Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them by Newt Scamander

## The Dark Forces: A Guide to Self-Protection by Quentin Tremble

### Other Equipment

1 wand

1 cauldron (pewter, standard size 2)

1 set glass or crystal phials

1 telescope

1 set brass scales

Students may also bring an owl OR a cat OR a toad

PARENTS ARE REMINDED THAT FIRST YEARS

ARE NOT ALLOWED THEIR OWN BROOMSTICKS

"Can we buy all this in London?" Harry wondered aloud.

"If yeh know where to go," said Hagrid.

Harry had never been to London before. Although Hagrid seemed to know where he was going, he was obviously not used to getting there in an ordinary way. He got stuck in the ticket barrier on the Underground, and complained loudly that the seats were too small and the trains too slow.

"I don't know how the Muggles manage without magic," he said as they climbed a broken-down escalator that led up to a bustling road lined with shops.

Hagrid was so huge that he parted the crowd easily; all Harry had to do was keep close behind him. They passed book shops and music stores, hamburger restaurants and cinemas, but nowhere that looked as if it could sell you a magic wand. This was just an ordinary street full of ordinary people. Could there really be piles of wizard gold buried miles beneath them? Were there really shops that sold spell books and broomsticks? Might this not all be some huge joke that the Dursleys had cooked up? If Harry hadn't known that the Dursleys had no sense of humor, he might have thought so; yet

somehow, even though everything Hagrid had told him so far was unbelievable, Harry couldn't help trusting him.

"This is it," said Hagrid, coming to a halt, "the Leaky Cauldron. It's a famous place...and here's Arista and Hikosu, now!" the giant exclaimed as he saw four people walking closer to them.

"Please forgive Epsis. She's shy around strangers." Arista said, motioning towards the woman to her right. Hikosu, however, didn't hold back from pouncing on her best friend.

Harry! I missed you! She exclaimed while hugging him around the waist. He laughed out loud, extremely relieved to see her again.

"Your hair is purple! I love it... and your eyes!" he gasped as he saw that they were now silver. He hugged her tighter and a feeling of wholeness bathed their bodies. Arista, Cael, and Epsis gave them a knowing look, but the two of them were ignorant. After the two separated, Arista apologized and left after she explained that she and Epsis needed to do something for Dumbledore.

They turned to the pub – it was a tiny, grubby-looking place. If Hagrid hadn't pointed it out, Harry wouldn't have noticed it was there. The people hurrying by didn't glance at it. Their eyes slid from the big book shop on one side to the record shop on the other as if they couldn't see the Leaky Cauldron at all. In fact, Harry had the most peculiar feeling that only he, Hikosu, Hagrid, and Cael, as the silver eyed girl introduced him as such, could see it. Before he could mention this, Hagrid and Cael had steered them inside.

For a famous place, it was very dark and shabby. A few old women were sitting in a corner, drinking tiny glasses of sherry, but they turned their heads when they caught Hikosu's purple hair. Cael instinctive moved closer and glared at anyone and everyone who looked her way. One of the women was smoking a long pipe. A little man in a top hat was talking to the old bartender, who was quite bald and looked like a toothless walnut.

The low buzz of chatter stopped when they walked in. everyone seemed to know Hagrid; they waved and smiled at him, and the bartender reached for a glass saying, "The usual, Hagrid?"

"Can't, Tom. I'm on Hogwarts business," said Hagrid, clapping his great hand on Harry's shoulder and making Harry's knees buckle. Cael rested his smaller hands on Hikosu's shoulders as he stood behind her, tail wagging in irritation as witches and wizards continued to stare at Hikosu's purple hair.

"Good Lord," said the bartender, peering at both children, "is this – can this be –?" the Leaky Cauldron had suddenly gone completely still and silent.

"Bless my soul," whispered the old bartender, "Harry Potter and Hikosu Snape...and an animal guide even! What an honor!" He hurried out from behind the bar, rushed toward Harry and Hikosu as he seized each of their hands in turn, tears in his eyes.

"Welcome back, Mr. Potter, Miss Snape, welcome back." Both children didn't know what to say. Everyone was looking at them. The old woman with the pipe was puffing on it without realizing it had gone out. Hagrid was beaming, but Cael was glaring.

Bloody mongrels need to keep their eyes to themselves. He said, making the silver eyed girl in front of him giggle. She relayed the message to Harry and he laughed as well, both of their spirits soaring.

Then...there was a great scraping of chairs and the next moment, Harry and Hikosu found themselves shaking hands with everyone in the Leaky Cauldron.

"Doris Crockford, Mr. Potter, Miss Snape, can't believe I'm meeting you two at last."

"So proud, Miss Snape, I'm just so proud."

"Always wanted to shake your hand – I'm all of a flutter."

"Delighted, Mr. Potter, just can't tell you, Diggle's the name, Dedalus Diggle."

"I've seen you before!" said Harry, as Dedalus Diggle's top hat fell off in his excitement. "You bowed to me once in a shop."



"He remembers!" cried Dedalus Diggle, looking around at everyone. "Did you hear that? He remembers me!"

Harry shook hands again and again, but Cael finally started growling at everyone who came close to Hikosu. They took the hint, but were in awe that they were in the presence of an Animalia and an animal guide. Poor Harry – Doris Crockford kept coming back for more. A pale young man made his way forward, very nervously. One of his eyes was twitching and he seemed afraid of the young Animalia.

"Professor Quirrell!" said Hagrid. "Harry, Hikosu, Professor Quirrell will be one of your teachers at Hogwarts."

"P-P-Potter, S-S-Snape," stammered Professor Quirrell, grasping Harry's hand. He looked at Hikosu, but Cael growled low in his throat.

He smells evil. I don't trust him. Cael commented as he growled.

Really? I get this uncomfortable feeling around him, too. Hikosu commented back as she stepped back against him. Cael made her feel safe.

"C-can't t-tell you how p-pleased I am to meet you."

"What sort of magic do you teach, Professor Quirrell?" Harry asked, giving Hikosu a strange expression. He felt her uncomfortable emotions.

"D-Defense Against the D-D-Dark Arts," muttered Professor Quirrell, as though he'd rather not think about it. "N-not that you n-need it, eh, P-Potter, S-Snape?" He laughed nervously.

"You'll be g-getting all your equipment, I suppose? I've g-got to p-pick up a new b-bok on vampires m-myself." He looked terrified at the very thought.

But the others would let Professor Quirrell keep Harry and Hikosu to himself. It took almost ten minutes to get away from them all. At last, Hagrid and Cael managed to make himself heard over the babble.

I'm going to have to phase back. I can protect you better as a wolf than if I were a hybrid if you're in danger. He whispered to the silver

eyed girl as he phased into the great white wolf form. He kneeled down and whined, letting her know that he wanted her on his back.

Are you sure? Aren't I heavy, Cael? Hikosu asked him but he let out a sort of bark of laughter.

Yes, I'm sure. And you're not heavy, little one. In fact, you're very light. He said and she sighed in defeat, mounting the oversized wolf. He whined again, making her look down at him.

Tell Harry that he's welcome to ride, too. I'm more than strong enough to carry his weight...for now that is. When he gets bigger then we might have problems. The wolf joked as Hikosu laughed, the little bell chiming.

Harry, Cael says you can ride, too. She said, patting the area of the wolf behind her. He hesitated before getting on the wolf as well, wrapping his arms around the girl's waist.

"Must get on – lots ter buy. Come on, Cael." Doris Crockford shook Harry's hand one last time, and Hagrid led them through the bar and out into a small, walled courtyard, where there was nothing but a trash can and a few weeds.

Hagrid grinned at Harry.

"Told yeh, didn't I? told yeh you was famous. Same fer you, Hikosu. Even Professor Quirrel was tremblin' ter meet yeh – mind you, he's usually tremblin'."

"Is he always that nervous?"

"Oh, yeah. Poor bloke. Brilliant mind. He was fine while he was studyin' outta books but then he took a year off ter get some firsthand experience...they say he met vampires in the Black Forest, and there was a nasty bit o' trouble with a hag – never b een the same since. Scared of the students, scared of his own subject – now, where's me umbrella?"

"Vampires? Hags? Harry's head was swimming and Hikosu's mouth was open slightly. Hagrid, meanwhile, was counting the bricks in the wall above the trash can.

"Three up...two across..." he muttered. "Right, stand back, Cael." And the wolf did so.

Hagrid tapped the wall three times with the point of his umbrella. The brick he had touched quivered – it wriggled – in the middle, a small hole appeared – it grew wider and wider – a second later they were facing an archway large enough even for Hagrid, an archway onto a cobbled street that twisted and turned out of sight.

"Welcome," said Hagrid, "to Diagon Alley."

He grinned at both Harry and Hikosu's amazement. They stepped through the archway. Harry looked quickly over his shoulder and saw the archway shrink instantly back into solid wall. The sun shone brightly on a stack of cauldrons outside the nearest shop. Cauldrons – All Sizes – Copper, Brass, Pewter, Silver – Self-Stirring – Collapsible, said a sign hanging over them.

"Yeah, you'll be needin' one," said Hagrid, "but we gotta get yer money first."

Harry wished he had about eight more eyes. He and Hikosu were turning their heads in every direction as they rode Cael up the street, trying to look at everything at once: the shops, the things outside them, the people doing their shopping. People were pointing to them as well, or more like the giant white wolf they were riding.

"Mummy! Mum, look! An animal guide! Which one of them do you think is an Animalia?" a child asked, tugging at his mother's robe.

Several people bowed to them, but neither Harry nor Hikosu knew why. A plump woman outside an Apothecary was shaking her head as they passed, saying, "Dragon liver, seventeen Sickles an ounce, they're mad...."

A low, soft hooting came from a dark shop with a sign saying Eeylops Owl Emporium – Tawny, Screech, Barn, Brown, and Snowy. Several boys of about Harry's age had their noses pressed against a window with broomsticks in it.

"Look," Harry heard one of them say, "the new Nimbus Two Thousand – fastest ever." There were shops selling robes, shops selling telescopes and strange silver instruments Harry and Hikosu

had never seen before, windows stacked with barrels of bat spleens and eels' eyes, tottering piles of spell books, quills, and rolls of parchment, potion bottles, globes of the moon...

"Gringotts," said Hagrid.

They had reached a snowy white building that towered over the other little shops. Standing beside its burnished bronze doors, wearing a uniform of scarlet and gold, was –

"Yeah, that's a goblin." Said Hagrid quietly as they walked up the white stone steps toward him.

"I'm sorry, Sir. Animal guides must be in hybrid form when inside Gringotts." The goblin said while bowing. Harry and Hikosu looked at each other before shrugging and dismounting Cael. He then phased into his hybrid form, looking disgruntled at the goblin, who only shrugged.

The goblin was about a head shorter than Harry. He had a swarthy, clever face, a pointed beard and, Harry noticed, very long fingers and feet. He bowed one last time as they walked inside. Now they were facing a second pair of doors, silver this time, with words engraved upon them:

Enter, stranger, but take heed

Of what awaits the sin of greed,

For those who take, but do not earn,

Must pay most dearly in their turn.

So if you seek beneath our floors

A treasure that was never yours,

Thief, you have been warned, beware

Of finding more than treasure there.

"Like I said, ye'd be mad ter try an' rob it," said Hagrid.

A pair of goblins bowed them through the silver doors and they were in a vast marble hall. About a hundred more goblins were sitting on high stools behind a long counter, scribbling in large ledgers, weight coins in brass scales, examining precious stones through eyeglasses. There were too many doors to count leading off the hall, and yet more goblins were showing people in and out of these. Hagrid and Harry made for one counter while Cael showed Hikosu to the one next to them. The one goblin was manning both counters at the moment.

"Morning," said Hagrid to a free goblin. "We've come ter take some money outta Mr. Harry Potter's safe."

"You have his key, sir?"

"Got it here somewhere," said Hagrid. While he was looking the goblin turned to the white haired wolf hybrid.

"Ah! Master animal guide. What can I do for you today?" the goblin cried, drawing the attention of several others. They began whispering, but Cael ignored them.

"We wish to draw money from Hikosu Snape's monetary account. I have her key here, sir." Cael said, pulling a small silver key from a pouch from around his neck.

"Of course, of course. Everything seems in order for the young Mistress Animalia." He said, barely glancing at the key. As he turned back to speak with Hagrid, Hikosu asked Cael a few questions.

Why did they seem so eager to meet with us, Cael? Surely it's not because I'm... 'famous', is it? She asked him with a curious gleam in her eyes. The taller form sent a warm smile down at her and happily answered her question.

No...well sort of. Yes, you are famous, which makes people excited, but for you, little one, it is because you are an Animalia. There are less than a thousand left in the world and only about four hundred who actually leave the sanctuary of the Animalia Life Spring. Less than that live in England because of the Dark war that happened years ago. We, as animal guides, are naturally powerful, but you, little one, are a direct child of the Earthen Magic. Pure magic. People are drawn to you because of your power, but don't let that

fool you. You will be able to tell friend from foe. The hybrid explained to the curious little girl in front of him.

So, because Animalia are powerful and rare I am respected? Hikosu clarified with a tilt to her head.

Well, Animalia are born with different levels of power. It is completely random, but, by some chance of fate, you are at the top of the totem pole. You can tell by the color of an Animalia's eyes. Silver is at the top, then Gold, Blue, and so on. Other magical creatures, like goblins, unicorns, and dragons, are also drawn to your power. It calms them...unlike your friend Harry. See? He's getting that stare from the goblin. Cael finished explaining as Hagrid began to empty his pockets in an attempt to find Harry's key.

He started emptying his pockets on the counter, scattering a handful of moldy dog biscuits over the goblins' book of numbers. The goblin wrinkled his nose. Harry watched the goblin on their right weighing a pile of rubies as big as glowing coals.

"Got it," said Hagrid at last, holding up a tiny golden key. It was almost identical to Hikosu's except for the fact it was golden whereas hers was silver. The goblin looked at it closely.

"That seems to be in order."

"An' I've also got a letter her from Professor Dumbledore," said Hagrid importantly, throwing out his chest. "It's about the You-Know-What in vault seven hundred thirteen."

The goblin read the letter carefully.

"Very well," he said, handing it back to Hagrid, "I will have someone take you down to all three vaults. Griphook!"

Griphook was yet another goblin. Once Hagrid had crammed all the dog biscuits back inside his pockets, he, Harry, Hikosu, and Cael followed Griphook toward one of the doors leading off the hall.

"What's the You-Know-What in vault seven hundred and thirteen?" Harry asked as he grabbed Hikosu's hand.

"Can't tell yeh that," said Hagrid mysteriously. "Very secret. Hogwarts business. Dumbledore's trusted me. More'n my job's worth ter tell yeh that."

Griphook held the door open for them. Harry and Hikosu, who had expected more marble, were surprised. They were in a narrow stone passageway lit with flaming torches. It sloped steeply downward and there were little railway tracks on the floor. Griphook whistled and a small cart came hurtling up the tracks toward them. They climbed in – Hagrid with some difficulty – and they were off. It was slightly cramped so Cael had Hikosu sit on his lap, one arm of his wrapped protectively around her waist and her hand still encased in Harry's.

At first they just hurtled through a maze of twisting passages. Harry tried to remember, left, right, right, left, middle fork, right, left, but it was impossible. The rattling cart seemed to know its own way, because Griphook wasn't steering.

Both of the children's eyes stung as the cold air rushed past them, but they kept their eyes wide open. Once, he thought he saw a burst of fire at the end of a passage and twisted around to see if it was a dragon, but too late – they plunged even deeper, passing an underground lake where huge stalactites and stalagmites grew from the ceiling and floor.

"I never know," Harry called to the others over the noise of the cart, "what's the difference between a stalagmite and a stalactite?"

Cant...answer...going to be...sick... Hikosu stuttered as she tried to hold in her small dinner from the previous day. The only thing she had eaten that day was...well...liquid magic.

Hold on, little one, the ride's almost over. Cael comforted, tightening his hold on her.

"Stalagmite's got an 'm' in it," said Hagrid. "An' don' ask me questions just now, I think I'm gonna be sick." He had pegged Hikosu's feeling on the dot. Hagrid did look very green, and when the cart stopped at last beside a small door in the passage wall, Hagrid got out and had to lean against the wall to stop his knees from trembling.

Griphook unlocked the door. A lot of green smoke came billowing out, and as it cleared, Harry and Hikosu gasped. Inside were mounds of gold coins. Columns of silver. Heaps of little bronze Knuts.

"All yours," smiled Hagrid.

All Harry's – it was incredible. The Dursleys couldn't have known about this or they'd have had it from him faster than blinking. How often had they complained how much Harry cost them to keep? And all the time there had been a small fortune belonging to him, buried deep under London.

Hagrid helped Harry pile some of it into a bag.

"The gold ones are Galleons," he explained. "Seventeen silver Sickles to a Galleon and twenty-nine Knuts to a Sickle, it's easy enough. Right, that should be enough fer a couple o' terms, we'll keep the rest safe for yeh." He turned to Griphook. "Hikosu's vault, then seven hundred and thirteen, please, and can we go more slowly?"

"One speed only," said Griphook. Once they reached Hikosu's vault they were surprised at the amount of money that was there.

"Professor Snape's been savin' money fer you fer ten years that accumulated. He has his own vault so dun worry 'bout that." Hagrid explained.

"I've been putting money in there for you as well, little one. It's not like I need it, eh? I can just hunt for food and such." Cael added. They gathered Hikosu's money as quickly as they did Harry's and soon they were going even deeper into the mine. They were going even deeper now and gathering speed. The air became colder and colder as they hurtled round tight corners. They went rattling over an underground ravine, and Harry leaned over the side to try to see what was down at the dark bottom, but Hikosu let out a silent shriek for him to stop.

HARRY! What the – don't do that! She exclaimed in his mind as Cael used his free arm to jerk him back into the cart. From that moment on Hagrid kept a hand on Harry's scruff on the back of his neck.



When they reached their destination an unusual sight awaited them. Vault seven hundred and thirteen had no keyhole.

"Stand back," said Griphook importantly. He stroked the door gently with one of his long fingers and it simply melted away.

"If anyone but a Gringotts goblin tried that, they'd be sucked through the door and trapped in there," said Griphook.

"How often do you check to see if anyone's inside?" Harry asked. Hikosu looked at the goblin with a strange look on her face; the goblin smiled at her, but gave Harry a dark look.

"About once every ten years," said Griphook with a rather nasty grin.

Something really extraordinary had to be inside the top security vault, Harry was sure, and he leaned forward eagerly, expecting to see fabulous jewels at the very least before Hikosu jabbed him in the side.

That's impolite, Harry! She scolded, silver eyes flashing playfully. He only laughed and continued looking around the vault. At first he thought it was empty. Then, he noticed a grubby little package wrapped up in brown paper lying on the floor. Hagrid picked it up and tucked it deep inside his coat. Both of the children longed to know what it was, but knew better than to ask.

"Come on, back in this infernal cart, and don't talk to me on the way back, it's best if I keep me mouth shut," said Hagrid. Hikosu nodded while Cael gave both children a reassuring pat on the back.

One wild cart ride later they stood blinking in the sunlight outside Gringotts. The wolven hybrid phased back into his natural form and both children mounted him at the nod of his head. Harry didn't know where to go first now that he had a bag full of money. He didn't have to know many Galleons there were to a pound to know that he was holding more money than he'd had in his whole life – more money than even Dudley ever had. He looked at the girl before him, grinning widely when he saw how excited she was. Her happiness floated through him like a warm breeze, and he intended to keep it that way.

"Might as well get yer uniforms." Said Hagrid, nodding toward Madam Malkin's Robes for All Occasions.

"Listen, Harry, would yeh mind if I slipped off fer a pick-me-up in the Leaky Cauldron? I hate them Gringotts carts." He did still look a bit sick, so Harry and Hikosu entered Madam Malkin's shop with Cael, feeling nervous.

Cael sat down on a free chair, earning awed looks from the patrons both inside and outside the store. Madam Malkin was a squat, smiling witch dressed in all mauve.

"Oh, dear. That looks quite uncomfortable." She said, pointing at Hikosu's neck as soon as she looked at them. She waved her wand and the strip of material covering Hikosu's Animalia mark came right off. She caught it in her hands, looking down at it with a nostalgic feeling.

"Want me to tie it on your wrist?" Harry asked and she nodded, smiling widely at him. He did as he promised, earning him a kiss on the cheek.

"Hogwarts, dears?" she asked, when Harry started to speak for them. She was looking at Hikosu with excitement shining clearly in her eyes. "Got the lot here – another young man being fitted up just now, in fact."

In the back of the shop, a boy with a pale, pointed face was standing on a footstool while a second witch pinned up his long black robes. Madam Malkin stood Harry on a stool next to him, slipped on a long robe over his head, and began to pin it to the right length. Another assistant witch did the same for Hikosu.

"Hello," said the boy, "Hogwarts, too?" he asked them.

"Yes," said Harry. The boy waited for an answer from the violet haired, silver eyed girl, but started fuming when she didn't answer.

"She's mute. She can't speak." Harry quickly replied for her, "But she'll be coming with us." The boy's expression quickly changed.

"My father's next door buying my books and mother's up the street looking at wands," said the boy. He had a bored, drawling voice.

"Then I'm going to drag them off to loko at racing brooms. I don't see why first years can't have their own. I think I'll bully father into getting me one and I'll smuggle it in somehow."

Harry was strongly reminded of Dudley, as was Hikosu.

Gosh, what is his problem? He's such a horrible git! The silver eyed girl exclaimed as she glared at the blond boy.

"Have you got your own broom?" the boy went on, ignoring Hikosu now that he knew she couldn't talk.

"No," said Harry.

"Play Quidditch at all?"

"No," Harry said again, wondering what on Earth Quidditch could be. He shared a look with the girl beside him, but she only shrug her shoulders.

"I do – Father says it's a crime if I'm not picked to play for my house, and I must say, I agree. Know what house you'll be in yet?"

"No," said Harry, feeling more stupid by the minute.

"Well, no one really knows until they get there, do they, but I know I'll be in Slytherin, all our family have been – imagine being in Hufflepuff, I think I'd leave, wouldn't you?"

"Mmm," said Harry, wishing he could say something a bit more interesting.

"I say, look at that man! He looks like one of those rare animal guides! And that one there!" said the boy suddenly as he turned around. He nodded towards the window. Hagrid was standing outside with Cael and they were each holding two large ice cream cones to show they couldn't come in.

"That's Hagrid," said Harry, pleased to know something the boy didn't. "He works at Hogwarts."

Don't tell him about Cael. Something tells me this boy will only question me about it...and I don't know much to begin with. If Arista

were here... Hikosu said, giving Harry a pleading look with her haunting silver eyes.

"Oh," said the boy, "I've heard of him. He's a sort of servant, isn't he?"

"He's the gamekeeper," said Harry. He liked the boy less and less every second.

"Yes, exactly. I heard he's a sort of savage – lives in a hut on the school grounds and every now and then he gets drunk, tries to do magic, and ends up setting fire to his bed."

"I think he's brilliant," said Harry coldly. Hikosu just glared at the blond boy.

"Do you?" said the boy with a slight sneer. "Why is he with you? Where are your parents?"

"They're dead," said shortly. He didn't feel much like going into the matter with this boy.

"Oh, sorry," said the other, not sounding sorry at all. "But they were our kind, weren't they?"

"They were a witch and wizard, if that's what you mean."

"What about her?" he asked, glancing at Hikosu and looking at her Animalia marking with interest. Apparently he didn't know what it meant.

"She's an Animalia." Was all Harry said. The other boy's eyes widened as he gasped. Apparently the Animalia were as rare as Cael mentioned.

"I really don't think they should let the other sort in, do you? They're just not the same; they've never been brought up to know our ways. Some of them have never even heard of Hogwarts until they get the letter, imagine. I think they should keep it in the old wizarding families. What's your surname, anyway?"

But before Harry could answer, Madam Malkin said, "That's you done, my dear," said Harry, not sorry for an excuse to stop talking to the boy, hopped down from the footstool.

"Well, I'll see you at Hogwarts, I suppose," said the drawling boy.

Both of the two children were rather quiet as they ate their ice cream Hagrid and Cael had bought them – chocolate and raspberry with chopped nuts...well minus the nuts for Hikosu because she was allergic to them. Hey, not even Animalia were perfect.

"What's up?" said Hagrid. Cael was staring at the silver eyed girl intently.

"Nothing." Harry lied for the both of them. They stopped to buy parchment and quills. Harry cheered up a bit when he found a bottle of ink that changed color as you wrote and Hikosu found a quill that wrote in any language you desired. When they left the shop, Harry said, "Hagrid, what's Quidditch?"

"Blimey, Harry, I keep forgettin' how little yeh know – not knowin' about Quidditch!"

"Don't make me feel worse," said Harry. He told Hagrid about the pale boy in Madam Malkin's.

"-and he said people from Muggle families shouldn't even be allowed in –"

"Yer not from a Muggle family. If he'd known who yeh were – he's grown up knowin gyer name if his parents are wizardin' folk. You saw what everyone in the Leaky cauldron was like when they saw yeh. Anyway, what does he know about it, some o' the best I ever saw were the only ones with magic in 'em in a long line o' Muggles – look at yer mum! Look what she had fer a sister!"

"So what is Quidditch?"

"It's our sport. Wizard sport. It's like – like soccer in the Muggle world – everyone follows Quidditch – played up in the air on broomsticks and there's four balls – sorta hard ter explain the rules."

"And what are Slytherin and Hufflepuff?"

"Shool houses. There are four. Everyone says Hufflepuff are a lot o' duffers, but –"

"I bet I'm in Hufflepuff," said Harry gloomily.

"Better Hufflepuff than Slytherin," said Hagrid darkly. "There's not a single witch or wizard who went bad who wasn't in Slytherin. You-Know-Who was one."

"Vol-, sorry – You-Know-Who was at Hogwarts?" Hikosu was listening in on the conversation and longed to take part of it, but because of the Animalia mark she couldn't.

Little one, do not be afraid to speak. Let me be your voice. Cael suggested, looking down at the silver eyed girl. She smiled slightly and let her voice fill his head, letting him become her voice.

"Years an' years ago," said Hagrid.

"Hikosu wants to know if he was he evil in school." Cael said, patting her shoulder. Harry felt a pang of jealousy run through him. Why didn't he ask him to speak for her?

"Oh-er-he was a bit shady in his day. Didn't go completely evil until he graduated, mind you." Was Hagrid's reply.

They bought Harry and Hikosu's school books in a shop called Flourish and Blotts where the shelves were stacked to the ceiling with books as large as paving stones bound in leather; books the size of postage stamps in covers of silk; books full of peculiar symbols and a few books with nothing in them at all.

Even Dudley, who never read anything, would have been wild to get his hands on some of these. Hagrid almost had to drag Harry away from Curses and Counter-curses (Bewitch Your Friends and Befuddle Your Enemies with the Latest Revenge: Hair Loss, Jelly-Legs, Tongue-Tying and much, Much More) by Vindictus Viridian.

"I was trying to find out how to curse Dudley."

"I'm not sayin' that's not a good idea, but yer not ter ues magic in the Muggle world except in very special circumstances," said Hagrid.

"An' anyway, yeh couldn' work any of them curses yet, yeh'll need a lot more study before yeh get ter that level."

Hikosu, however, was looking through several books about magical creatures. Cael looked on proudly behind her; he was encouraging her to broaden her horizons as much as she could and meet new people, but he also knew it was hard for her because she was shy. Her eye settled on a book about rare magical creatures and picked it up, only to have it plucked out of her hands by her wolven counterpart.

"Don't say anything, but I'll get this for you as an early birthday present for you. Tomorrow I have to go to the Life Spring and stock up on its magic for you. You only have enough for two more days." He softly said, ruffling her hair. She giggled soundlessly, but the sound of the bell on her wrist echoed through the store.

Hagrid wouldn't let Harry buy a solid gold cauldron, either – much to the silver eyed girl's amusement – ("It says pewter on yer list"), but they both got a nice set of scales for weighing potion ingredients and a collapsible brass telescope. Then they visited the Apothecary, which was fascinating enough to make up for its horrible smell, a mixture of bad eggs and rotted cabbages.

Barrels of slimy stuff stood on the floor; jars of herbs, dried roots, and bright powders lined the walls; bundles of feathers, strings of fangs, and snarled claws hung from the ceiling. While Hagrid asked the man behind the counter for a supply of some basic potion ingredients for Harry, Harry himself examined silver unicorn horns at twenty-one Galleons each and minuscule, glittery-black beetle eyes for five Knuts a scoop. Hikosu was entranced with the phoenix feathers.

Outside the Apothecary, Hagrid checked Harry's list again.

"Just yer wands left – oh yeah, an' I still haven't got yeh a birthday present, Harry."

Harry felt himself go red.

"You don't have to –"

"I know I don't have to. Tell yeh what, I'll get yer animal. Not a toad, toads went outta fashion years ago, yeh'd be laughed at. An' I don' like cats, they make me sneeze. I'll get yer an owl. All the kids want owls, they're dead useful, carry yer mail an' everythin'."

Twenty minutes later, they left Eeylops Owl Emporium, which had been dark and full of rustling and flickering, jewel-bright eyes. Harry now carried a large cage that held a beautiful snowy owl, fast asleep with her head under her wing. He couldn't stop stammering his thanks, sounding just like Professor Quirrell.

"Don' mention it," said Hagrid gruffly. "Don' expect you've had a lotta presents from them Dursleys. Just Ollivanders left now – only place fer wands, Ollivanders, and yeh gotta have the best wands."

A magic wand...this was what Harry and Hikosu had been really looking forward to. The last shop was narrow and shabby. Peeling gold letters over the door read Ollivanders: Makers of Fine Wands since 382 B.C. A single wand lay on a faded purple cushion in the dusty window.

A tinkling bell rang somewhere in the depths of the shop as they stepped inside. It was a tiny place, empty except for a single, spindly chair that Hagrid sat on to wait. Cael simply shifted into his wolf form and sat on the floor. Harry felt strangely as though he had entered a very strict library; he swallowed a lot of new questions that had just occurred to him and looked instead at the thousands of narrow boxes piled neatly right up to the ceiling. For some reason, the back of his neck prickled. The very dust and silence in here seemed to tingle with some secret magic. He looked over at Hikosu and smiled at her excited face, once again gripping her hand with his.

"Good afternoon," said a soft voice. Harry jumped. Hagrid must have jumped, too, because there was a loud crunching noise and he got quickly off the spindly chair. Cael let out a snort – Hikosu interpreted it as a laugh when he was in his wolf form.

An old man was standing before them, his wide, pale eyes shining like moons through the gloom of the shop.

"Hello," said Harry awkwardly.



"Ah yes," said the man. "Yes, yes. I thought I'd be seeing you soon. Harry Potter. Hikosu Snape." They weren't questions. "You have your mother's eyes, Harry. It seems only yesterday she was in here herself, buying her first wand. Ten and a quarter inches long, swishy, made of willow. Nice wand for charm work."

Mr. Ollivander moved closer to Harry. Harry wished he would blink. Those silver eyes were a bit creepy, but they were nowhere near the level of intensity that Hikosu bestowed upon him.

"Your father, on the other hand, favored a mahogany wand. Eleven inches. Pliable. A little more power and excellent for transfiguration. Well, I say your father favored it – it's really the wand that chooses the wizard or witch, of course"

He then moved onto Hikosu.

"Ah, your father – Professor Snape – favored a wand made of ebony. Ten inches, stiff. Most excellent for excelling in the magic of potion brewing."

He moved closer to her and Cael fought the urge to move closer to her. Then, he turned back to Harry. Mr. Ollivander had come so close that he and Harry were almost nose to nose. The emerald eyed boy could see himself reflected in those misty eyes.

What the hell is he doing? Hikosu asked both of the ones who could hear her. Cael shook his head, but Harry didn't reply. Mr. Ollivander touched the lightning scar on Harry's forehead with a long, white finger.

"I'm sorry to say I sold the wand that did it," he said softly.

"Thirteen-and-a-half inches. Yew. Powerful wand, very powerful, and in the wrong hands...well, if I'd known what that wand was going out into the world to do..." he shook his head and then, to Harry's relief, spotted Hagrid.

"Rubeus! Rubeus Hagrid! How nice to see you again...Oak, sixteen inches, rather bendy, wasn't it?"

"It was, sir, yes," said Hagrid.

"Good wand, that one. But I suppose they snapped it in half when you got expelled?" said Mr. Ollivander, suddenly stern.

"Er – yes, they did, yes," said Hagrid, shuffling his feet. "I've still got the pieces, though," he added brightly.

"But you don't use them?" said Mr. Ollivander sharply.

"Oh, no, sir," said Hagrid quickly. Harry noticed he gripped his pink umbrella very tightly as he spoke.

"Hmmm," said Mr. Ollivander, giving Hagrid a piercing look.

"Well, now – Mr. Potter. Let me see." He pulled a long tape measure with silver markings out of his pocket. "Which is your wand arm?"

"Er- well, I'm right-handed." Said Harry.

"Hold out your arm. That's it." He measured Harry from shoulder to finger, then wrist to elbow, shoulder to floor, knee to armpit, and round his head. As he measured he said, "Every Ollivander wand has a core of powerful magical substance, Mr. Potter. We use unicorn hairs, phoenix tail feathers, and the heartstrings of dragons. Occasionally, we use something different...but it is very rare indeed. And of course, you will never get such good results with another wizard's wand."

Harry suddenly realized that the tape measure, which was measuring between his nostrils, was doing this on its own. Hikosu was laughing at him, bells jingling in the otherwise silent room, but Harry just sent her a weirded out look. Mr. Ollivander was flitting around the shelves, taking down boxes.

"That will do," he said and the tape measure crumpled into a heap on the floor. "Right then, Mr. Potter. Try this one. Beechwood and dragon heartstring. Nine inches. Nice and flexible. Just take it and give it a wave."

Harry took the wand an, feeling foolish, waved it around a bit, but Mr. Ollivander snatched it out of his hand almost as once.

"Maple and phoenix feather. Seven inches. Quite whippy. Try –"

Harry tried – but he had hardly raised the wand when it, too, was snatched back by Mr. Ollivander.

"No, no – here, ebony and unicorn hair, eight and a half inches, springy. Go on, go on, try it out."

Harry tried with the encouragement of the silver eyed girl beside him. He tried and tried. He had no idea what Mr. Ollivander was waiting for. The pile of tried wands was mounting higher and higher on the spindly chair, but the more wands Mr. Ollivander pulled from the shelves, the happier he seemed to become.

"Tricky customer, eh? Not to worry, we'll find the the perfect match here somewhere – I wonder, now – yes, why not – unusual combination – holly and phoenix feather, eleven inches, nice and supple."

Harry took the wand. He felt sudden warmth in his fingers. He raised the wand above his head, brought it swishing down through the dusty air and a stream of red and gold sparks shot from the end like a firework, throwing dancing spots of light on to the walls. Hagrid whooped and clapped and Mr. Ollivander cried, "Oh, bravo! Yes, indeed, oh, very good. Well, well, well...how curious...how very curious..."

He put Harry's wand back into its box and wrapped it in brown paper, still muttering, "Curious...curious..."

"Sorry," said Harry, "But what's curious?"

Mr. Ollivander fixed Harry with his pale stare.

"I remember every wand I've ever sold, Mr. Potter. Every single wand. It so happens that the phoenix whose tail feather is in your wand, gave another feather – just one other. It is very curious indeed that you should be destined for this wand when its brother – why, its brother gave you that scar."

Harry swallowed.

"Yes, thirteen-and-a-half inches. Yew. Curious indeed how these things happen. The wand chooses the wizard, remember...I think we must expect great things from you, Mr. Potter...after all, He-

Who-Must-Not-Be-Named did great things – terrible, yes, but great."

Harry shivered, but Mr. Ollivander moved onto the girl next to him.

"Raise your wand hand, Miss Snape." He requested as she raised her right hand. Several minutes later the measuring was done with and he had a pile of wands for her to try.

"Willow, ten inches, flexible. Good for Defense, that is." And Hikosu waved the wand, but nothing happened. As soon as she did it was snatched from her hand. It appears that the same look was on Mr. Ollivander's face as he searched for the perfect wand for her.

She went through two yew wands, seven willow wands, one oak wand, three birch wands, and five holly wands before he stopped and stroked his chin in thought.

"You are an Animalia, are you not, Miss Snape? Then maybe...maybe I have the wand for you. It is an unusual mixture with rare properties, but I believe that it will choose you." Mr. Ollivander said, exiting into the back room. He returned a short time later with a beautiful wand.

"A perfect blend of Apple wood and Bonsai. It represents magic, youth, peace, and all that is good. Eleven inches as well. The core is most mysterious and rather hard to come by; a hair from the tail of a type of Chinese unicorn, known as a Ki-lin. Very, very good for transfiguration." Mr. Ollivander explained, gently handing it to the silver eyed girl.

Hikosu lifted the wand like she did all of the others and a warm feeling flooded her senses. Instead of sparks, ribbons of gold and silver light exploded from her wand, wrapping around them all. Harry felt proud; she had such a unique wand as did he.

Both paid seven gold Galleons for their wands, and Mr. Ollivander bowed them from his shop.

The late afternoon sun hung low in the sky as Harry, Hagrid, Cael, and Hikosu made their way back down Diagon Alley, back through the wall, back through the Leaky Cauldron, now empty. Harry didn't speak at all as they walked down the road, but he grabbed at

Hikosu's hand for reassurance. Cael morphed into his wolf form and put up his glamour, now looking like a normal dog. The three of them didn't even notice how much people were gawking at them on the Underground, laden as they were with all their funny-shaped packages, with the snowy owl asleep in its cage on Harry's lap. Up another escalator, out into Paddington station; Harry only realized where they were when Hagrid tapped him on the shoulder.

"Got time fer a bite to eat before yer train leaves." He said. He bought Harry and Hikosu a hamburger and they sat down on plastic seats to eat them. Both of the children kept looking around. Everything was so different, so surreal somehow.

"You all right, Harry? Yer very quiet," said Hagrid.

Harry wasn't sure he could explain. He'd just had the best birthday of his life – and yet – he chewed his hamburger, trying to find the words.

"Everyone thinks we're special," he said at last. "All of those people in the Leaky Cauldron, Professor Quirrell, Mr. Ollivander...but we don't know anything about magic at all. How can they expect great things? I'm famous and I can't even remember what I'm famous for. I don't know what happened when Vol-, sorry – I mean, the night my mum died and dad disappeared."

Hagrid leaned across the table and Hikosu put her hand on his shoulder. She gave him a kiss on the cheek and he placed his hand on hers. Behind Hagrid's beard and eyebrows he wore a very kind smile.

"Don' you worry, Harry. You'll learn fast enough. Everyone starts at the beginning at Hogwarts, you'll be just fine. Just be yerself. I know it's hard. Yeh've been singled out, an' that's always hard. Hikosu is with yeh, she'll help yeh. But yeh'll have a great time at Hogwards – I did – still do, 'smatter of fact." He said as Hikosu nodded.

Hagrid helped Harry and Hikosu onto the train that would take him back to the Dursleys, then handed him an envelope.

"Yer tickets fer Hogwarts," he said. "first o' September – King's Cross – it's all on yer tickets. Any problems with the Dursleys, send me a letter with yer owl, she'll kow where to find me...See yeh soon,

Harry." Cael was able to enter the train with the excuse that he was Hikosu's guide dog.

The train pulled out of the station. Harry wanted to watch Hagrid until he was out of sight; he rose in his seat and pressed his nose against the window, but he blinked and Hagrid had gone.

Happy Birthday, Harry. Hikosu said as she handed him a small package. He tore it open and pulled out a plain piece of parchment.

It's enchanted so that the person with the other parchment can send messages to that one. I don't know how far away I can speak to you...so if we're separated into different houses I can always be with you. I hope you like it. She said. Harry felt a warm feeling swelling inside him as he looked up at her blushing face. He grinned; his first present from Hikosu and it was brilliant.

"It's brilliant, 'Kosu. I love it." He whispered as he brought her into a hug. Now, they couldn't wait until September first.

I apologize for this being so late. I recently started a summer course at my college to gain extra credits in a shorter amount of time so I could have a lighter load in the fall. Anyway...

Disclaimer: Anything relating to Harry Potter is owned by JK Rowling. I only own Hikosu, Cael, Arista, her animal guide (for the life of me I can't remember her name. Sad, isn't it?), Wolfsbaine, and Gawain...although the last two were only mentioned.

Thanks to:

Elia950 - Lol, yeah. I'm like that, too. Don't worry, though. Cael is like an older brother/uncle figure.

Raine44354 - XD I'm glad you love the story. I'll be working on the next chapter on my breaks at school.

TwilightEclps - I had the hardest time deciding that...but you'll have to find out, later.

GinnyLover14 - You kind of contradicted yourself. "Like the idea behind the story...don't want to think up your own story." I AM thinking up my own story because after the next couple of chapters (I don't know how far I'm going) it will be different. I know that after this book it will be definately different.

Jim Red Hawk - I almost cried when I read your review. I've gotten a couple of flames for this story, but when I go back and read your review, your kind words inspire me. Thank you.

DearPrudenceGirlHasGoneMad22 - Glad you like it!

## Chapter Six

### The Journey from Platform Nine and Three-Quarters

Harry and Hikosu's last month with the Dursleys wasn't fun. Actually, it was the opposite of fun. True, Dudley was now so scared of Harry he wouldn't stay in the same room, while Aunt Petunia and Uncle

Vernon didn't shut Harry in his cupboard, force him to do anything, or shout at him – in fact, they didn't speak to him at all.

Hikosu still had to drink water from the Animalia Life Spring. The Dursleys no longer welcomed the female Animalia inside the house now that they knew what she was, but with Cael's help she was able to sleep in Harry's room at night. Cael slept on the floor of the room in his wolf form. Both Harry and Hikosu asked if he wanted to sleep on the cramped bed as well, and he would have been happy to do so, but there just simply wasn't enough space.

Dudley and his friends made fun of the silver eyed girl more now than ever. They regarded her as a freak, but she didn't care as long as she was with Harry and her animal guide. When they had gotten back, the next day was Hikosu's birthday. She was now eleven as well. Cael had carved a nice choker to cover her Animalia mark. It possessed a sort of protection magic and was carved out of jade. It had a symbol of the wolf on it, symbolizing his everlasting loyalty to her. She never took it off.

Harry had gotten her an outstanding gift as well. It was a small action figure of a phoenix, about as big as the palm of her hand. It was charmed to fly around the room and croon when she was there and in the presence of a muggle it was charmed to stay still. She loved it.

Although the Dursleys were half terrified, half furious, they acted as though any chair with Harry in it were empty, they spat insults at Hikosu despite Cael's appearance. This was an improvement, sort of, but it did become a bit depressing after a while. The two of them trekked through it, however, and they were never happier.

Harry and Hikosu kept to the emerald eyed boy's room, with his new owl for company. Cael learned to voice his Animalia's thoughts...or the one's she was intending for Harry and the others to hear. It was kind of unnerving at first, but the bond was growing stronger between the wolf and the Animalia...so much that Cael was able to speak even though he was in his wolf form. The Earthen magic was strong in her.

As for Harry's owl, he decided to call her Hedwig, a name he had found in A History of Magic. Their school books were very interesting and they often found themselves lying in the bed and



reading late into the night, Hedwig swooping in and out of the open window as she pleased. Cael was often gone by midnight, hunting for himself and retrieving the next few days' worth of Life Spring water.

It was lucky that Aunt Petunia didn't come into Harry's room to vacuum anymore, because Hedwig kept bringing back dead mice. Every night before the two young magic users went to sleep, Harry ticked off another day on the piece of paper he had pinned to the wall, counting down to September the first. It seemed like a day of haven for the two, well three, of them.

Harry, Hikosu, and Cael had formed the strongest of bonds. The wolf was kind to the wizarding boy and encouraged him to speak his mind. After all, wolf animal guardians were beings who prided themselves in communication since they often ran in packs until they found their Animalia. Some, sadly, never did.

Eventually the Earthen magic became so strong that Cael was also able to speak to Harry in his mind. That way their conversation never ceased and Harry felt like he wasn't being left out of something important anymore.

On the last day of August Harry thought he'd better speak to his aunt and uncle about getting to King's Cross station the next day, so he went down to the living room where they were watching a quiz show on television. After drilling Cael to see whether or not he was able to get Hikosu to the station on time – earning a scoff from the wolf and a silent giggle from the silver eyed girl – he finally backed off. Harry cleared his throat to let them know he was there, and Dudley screamed and ran from the room.

"Er-Uncle Vernon?" he queried.

Uncle Vernon grunted to show he was listening.

"Er – I need to be King's Cross tomorrow to – to go to Hogwarts."

Uncle Vernon grunted again.

"Would it be alright if you gave me a lift?"

Grunt. Harry supposed that meant yes.

"Thank you."

He was about to go back upstairs when the large beefy man actually spoke. He turned to look at Harry and was 'quite surprised' when he didn't see either Hikosu or Cael anywhere near Harry. His lip curled up into a sneer.

"Hikosu isn't going?" Uncle Vernon asked in a nasty voice, actually calling his best friend by her name for once.

"No, sir. She's just travelling with Cael so we're not crowded." Harry spoke truthfully, despite the older and fatter man's disbelieving look.

"Huh. Funny way to get to a wizards' school, the train. Magic carpets all got punctures, have they?" he asked, with a smirk.

Harry didn't say anything just in case he accidentally lashed out and caused his uncle to refuse his ride. He only rolled his eyes and grit his teeth together.

"Where is this school, anyway?"

"I don't know," said Harry, realizing this for the first time. He pulled the ticket Hagrid had given him out of his pocket, reading it over again. It didn't say where the destination was – only the number of the platform.

"I just take the train from platform nine and three-quarters at eleven o'clock," he read.

His aunt and uncle stared at him with amused expressions. They thought he was lying.

"Platform what?"

"Nine and three-quarters." Harry supplied, waving the ticket in the air. He thought that if it was on the ticket then it was more than likely true.

"Don't talk rubbish," said Uncle Vernon. "There is no platform nine and three-quarters."

"It's on my ticket."

"Barking," said Uncle Vernon, "howling mad, the lot of them. You'll see. You just wait. All right, we'll take you to King's Cross. We're going up to London tomorrow anyway, or I wouldn't bother."

"Why are you going to London?" Harry asked, trying to keep things friendly.

"Taking Dudley to the hospital," growled Uncle Vernon. "Got to have that ruddy tail removed before he goes to Smeltings." Harry could faintly feel Hikosu's amusement through their bond. She was listening to the whole conversation through the open window.

Well, he certainly deserved it, the bloody git. Anyway, we've got an early morning, Harry. Be sure to get to bed early tonight. And he felt a wave of affection float towards him.

Harry couldn't wait to get to Hogwarts. Then maybe, just maybe, he would be able to learn how to speak back to her and send his emotions as well.

Harry woke at five o'clock the next morning and was too excited and nervous to go back to sleep. He got up and pulled on his jeans because he didn't want to walk into the station in his wizard's robes – he'd change on the train. He checked his Hogwarts list yet again to make sure he had everything he needed, saw that Hedwig was shut safely in her cage, and then paced the room, waiting for the Dursleys to get up. About an hour later he woke Hikosu, and she, in turn, woke Cael. The two of them got ready and left for the station; they were travelling the normal way for Animalia. Hikosu was going to ride on Cael's back. Another hour later, Harry's huge, heavy trunk had been loaded into the Dursleys' car, Aunt Petunia had talked Dudley into sitting next to Harry, and they had set off.

They reached King's Cross at half past ten. Uncle Vernon dumped Harry's trunk onto a cart and wheeled it into the station for him. Harry thought this was strangely kind until Uncle Vernon stopped dead, facing the platforms with a nasty grin on his face. His nasty grin faltered, however, when Hikosu meandered up with a dog by her side.

Glad to see you could make it, Harry she said before she gave him a peck on the cheek.

"Well, there you are, boy. Platform nine – Platform ten. Your platform should be somewhere in the middle, but they don't seem to have built it yet, do they?" Hikosu only rolled her eyes and Cael let out a fierce growl at the pudgy man before she took a look around.

He was quite right, of course. There was a big plastic number nine over one platform and a big plastic number ten over the one next to it, and in the middle, nothing at all.

"Have a good term," said Uncle Vernon with an even nastier smile. He left without another word. Harry turned and saw the Dursleys drive away. All three of them were laughing. Harry's mouth went rather dry. What on Earth was he going to do? He was starting to attract a lot of funny looks, because of Hedwig. He'd have to ask someone.

Harry...Harry! Calm down. Let's go ask someone for directions or something. Just be calm and they won't think you're mad. His silver eyed best friend said, giggling within his mind. He only rolled his eyes and gave her a little push before he looked around.

He stopped a passing guard, but didn't dare mention platform nine and three-quarters. The guard had never heard of Hogwarts and when Harry couldn't even tell him what part of the country it was in, he started to get annoyed, as though Harry was being stupid on purpose. Of course, he was perfectly nice to the little mute girl, but seeing her eyes he started to edge away. Getting desperate, Harry asked for the train that left at eleven o'clock, but the guard said there wasn't one.

In the end the guard strode away, muttering about time wasters. Harry was now trying hard not to panic, but Cael nudged them back where platforms nine and ten were. He had a feeling someone would be along to help them. According to the large clock over the arrivals board, he had ten minutes left to get on the train to Hogwarts and he had no idea how to do it; he was stranded in the middle of a station with a trunk he could hardly lift, a pocket full of wizard money, and a large owl.

Hagrid must have forgotten to tell him then something you had to do, like tapping the third brick on the left to get into Diagon Alley. He wondered if he should get out his wand and start tapping the ticket inspector's stand between platforms nine and ten. Hikosu was starting to get a little fidgety as well, but Cael came forward to nudge her hand with his nose. She didn't have any of her things with her, but Cael explained that one of his friends had taken her things to Hogwarts and he had her robes. She had her wand hidden in one of her pockets.

At that moment a group of people passed just behind him and he caught a few words of what they were saying.

" – packed with Muggles, of course –"

Harry, did you hear that? Hikosu excitedly asked, looking around for the source of the voice.

Harry swung round. The speaker was a plump woman who was talking to four boys, all with flaming red hair. Each of them was pushing a trunk like Harry's in front of him – and they had an owl.

Heart hammering, Harry pushed his cart after them, lacing his fingers with Hikosu's as he followed them. They stopped and so did he, just near enough to hear what they were saying. Hikosu leaned forward to hear what they were saying, but Cael had obviously recognized them since he bounded forward to the mother.

"Aw, no who is this handsome fellow?" she asked, bending down to pet him on the head. He stayed very still and suddenly released the charm he had surrounded himself with, morphing back to the shape of a wolf. Her children gasped, backing away from the wolf.

The woman obviously understood and held a smile. There was an Animalia about.

"Now, what's the platform number?" said the boys' mother.

"Nine and three-quarters!" piped a small girl, also red-headed, who was holding her hand, "Mom, can't I go..."

"you're not old enough, Ginny, now be quiet. All right, Percy, you go first."

Suddenly, Cael bounded back towards the silent violet haired girl, dragging her back towards the others. She watched as what looked like the oldest boy marched toward platforms nine and ten. Harry watched, careful not to blink in case he missed it – but just as the boy reached the dividing barrier between the two platforms, a large crowd of tourists came swarming in front of him and by the time the last backpack had cleared away, the boy had vanished.

"Fred, you next," the plump woman said.

"I'm not Fred, I'm George," said the boy. "Honestly, woman, you call yourself our mother? Can't you tell I'm George?"

"Sorry, George, dear."

"Only joking, I am Fred," said the boy, and off he went. His twin called after him to hurry up, and he must have done so, because a second later, he had gone – but how had he done it?

Now the third brother was walking briskly toward the barrier – he was almost there – and then, quite suddenly, he wasn't anywhere.

There was nothing else for it. Finally, Cael managed to drag Harry towards the woman as well.

"Excuse me," Harry said to the plump woman.

"Hello, dear," she said. "First time at Hogwarts? Ron's new, too." She pointed at the last and youngest of her sons. He was tall, thin, and gangling, with freckles, big hands and feet, and a long nose.

"Yes," said Harry. "The thing is – the thing is, we don't know how to \_"

"How to get onto the platform?" she said kindly, and Harry nodded.

"Not to worry," she said. "All you have to do is walk straight at the barrier between platforms nine and ten. Don't stop and don't be scared you'll crash into it, that's very important. Best do it at a bit of a run if you're nervous. Go on, go now before Ron. Your sister can go after you, with me, alright?"

"Er – okay," said Harry, disregarding the fact that she called Hikosu his sister.

He pushed his trolley around and stared at the barrier. It looked very solid.

He started to walk toward it. People jostled him on their way to platforms nine and ten. Harry walked more quickly. He was going to smash right into the barrier and then he'd be in trouble – leaning forward on his cart, he broke into a heavy run – the barrier was coming nearer and nearer – he wouldn't be able to stop – the cart was out of control – he was a foot away – he closed his eyes ready for the crash –

It didn't come...he kept on running...he opened his eyes.

A scarlet steam engine was waiting next to a platform packed with people. A sign overhead said Hogwarts Express, eleven o'clock. Harry looked behind him and saw a wrought-iron archway where the barrier had been, with the words Platform Nine and Three-Quarters on it. He had done it.

Smoke from the engine drifted over the heads of the chattering crowd, while cats of every color wound here and there between their legs. Owls hooted to one another in a disgruntled sort of way over the babble and the scraping of heavy trunks.

The first few carriages were already packed with students, some hanging out of the window to talk to their families, some fighting over seats. Harry pushed his cart off down the platform in search of an empty seat. He passed a round-faced boy who was saying, "Gran, I've lost my toad again."

Harry, wait for us. He heard Hikosu exclaim as he got too far ahead of him. She bowed slightly as thanks to the woman before mounting Cael and letting him dash through the crowd, drawing the attention of almost everyone there.

Almost instantly everyone broke out into whispers of an Animalia. Once she got to where Harry was situated the hustle and bustle of the station went back to normal.

"Oh, Neville," Harry heard the old woman sigh.

A boy with dreadlocks was surrounded by a small crowd.

"Give us a look, Lee, go on."

The boy lifted the lid of a box in his arms, and the people around him shrieked and yelled as something inside poked out a long, hairy leg.

Harry and Cael, with his Animalia still mounted on top of him, pressed on through the crowd until they found an empty compartment near the end of the train. Harry put Hedwig inside first and then started to shove and heave his trunk toward the train door. He tried to lift it up the steps but could hardly raise one end and twice he dropped it painfully on his foot. Cael sat Hikosu on one of the seats and phased into his humanoid figure, handing her a bag with her travel things in it, including her uniform, and went to help Harry with his trunk. The two of them heaved the trunk onto the train, but they were offered more help by another source.

"Want a hand?" it was one of the red-haired twins he'd followed through the barrier.

"Yes, please," Harry panted.

"Oy, Fred! C'mere and help!"

With the twins' help, Harry's trunk was at last tucked away in a corner of the compartment.

"Thanks," said Harry, pushing his sweaty hair out of his eyes.

"What's that?" said one of the twins suddenly, pointing at Harry's lightning scar.

"Blimey," said the other twin. "Are you -?"

"He is," said the first twin. "Aren't you?" he added to Harry.

"What?" said Harry.

"Harry Potter," chorused the twins.

"Oh, him," said Harry. "I mean, yes, I am."



The two boys gawked at him, and Harry felt himself turning red. Then, to his relief, a voice came floating in through the train's open door. The twins then noticed Hikosu in the compartment, eyes widening even further.

"Then you must be,"

"Yeah. Her name's Hikosu Snape." Harry finished for them.

"She says that is an Animalia and, therefore, mute. She cannot directly answer any of your questions." Cael translated for her.

"If you have any questions ask her and I shall respond for her." The male wolf said, sitting down next to the smiling girl.

"Fred? George? Are you there?"

"Coming, Mum."

With a last look at Harry, Hikosu, and Cael the twins hopped off the train.

Harry sat down opposite Cael and Hikosu, next to the window where, half hidden, he could watch the red-haired family on the platform and hear what they were saying. Their mother had just taken out her handkerchief. Hikosu was watching them, but she had also pulled out a book – *Magical Creatures and Where to Find Them* – to read on the journey to their new school.

"Ron, you've got something on your nose." And the silver eyed girl silently giggled.

The youngest boy tried to jerk out of the way, but the older woman grabbed him and began rubbing the end of his nose.

"Mum – geroff." He wiggled free.

"Aaah, had ickle Ronnie got somefink on his nose?" said one of the twins.

"Shut up," said Ron.

"Where's Percy?" said their mother.

"He's coming now."

The oldest boy came striding into sight. He had already changed into his billowing black Hogwarts robes, and Harry noticed a shiny silver badge on his chest with the letter P on it.

"Can't stay long, Mother," he said. "I'm up front, the prefects have got two compartments to themselves –"

"Oh, are you a prefect, Percy?" said one of the twins, with an air of great surprise. "You should have said something, we had no idea."

"Hang on, I think I remember him saying something about it," said the other twin. "Once-"

"Or twice –"

"A minute –"

"All summer –"

"Oh, shut up," said Percy the Prefect.

"How come Percy gets new robes, anyway?" said one of the twins.

"Because he's a prefect," said their mother fondly. "All right, dear, well, have a good term – send me an owl when you get there."

She kissed Percy on the cheek and he left. Then she turned to the twins.

"Now, you two – this year, you behave yourselves. If I get one more owl telling me you've – you've blown up a toilet or –"

"Blown up a toilet? We've never blown up a toilet."

"Great idea though, thanks, Mom."

"It's not funny. And look after Ron."

"Don't worry, ickle Ronniekins is safe with us."

"Shut up," said Ron again. He was almost as tall as the twins already and his nose was still ink where his mother had rubbed it.

"Hey, Mum, guess what? Guess who we just met on the train?"

Harry leaned back quickly so they couldn't see him looking.

"You know that black-haired boy who was near us in the station? Know who he is?"

"And that girl you thought was his sister?"

"Who?"

"Harry Potter!"

"and Hikosu Snape! She's an ANIMALIA, mum!"

Harry heard the little girl's voice. Hikosu flushed and Cael laughed when they mentioned the silver eyed Animalia.

"Oh, Mum, can I go on the train and see them, Mum, oh please..."

"You've already seen them, Ginny, and the poor children aren't something you goggle at in a zoo. Are they really, Fred? How do you know?"

"Asked him. Saw his scar. It's really there – like lightning."

"And he answered for Hikosu, mum. She's a mute – did you know?"

"And there's this guy who had wolf ears and a tail! He must be her animal guide!"

"Poor dears – no wonder they were alone, I wondered. He was ever so polite when he asked how to get onto the platform."

"Never mind that, do you think he remembers what You-Know-Who looks like? What about Hikosu?"

Their mother suddenly became very stern.

"I forbid you to ask them, Fred. No, don't you dare. As though they need reminding of that on their first day at school."

"All right, keep your hair on."

A whistle sounded.

"Hurry up!" their mother said, and the tree boys clambered onto the train. They leaned out of the window for her to kiss them good-bye, and their younger sister began to cry.

"Don't, Ginny, we'll send you loads of owls."

"We'll send you a Hogwarts toilet seat."

"George!"

"Only joking, Mum."

The train began to move. Harry saw the boys' mother waving and their sister, half laughing, half crying, running to keep up with the train until it gathered too much speed, and then she fell back and waved.

Harry watched the girl and her mother disappear as the train rounded the corner. Houses flashed past the window. Harry felt a great leap of excitement. He didn't know what he was going to – but it had to be better than what he was leaving behind. Hikosu was still quietly reading her book, but she had rested her head on Cael's shoulder.

Cael was like the older brother of the three. He was always looking out for them and encouraging the two of them to meet new people. All was silent for a few moments but Hikosu was startled when a great clamor sounded outside their door. The door of the compartment slid open and the youngest redheaded boy came in.

"Anyone sitting there?" he asked, pointing at the seat beside Harry. His eyes flickered to the man with the wolf ears and tail, but he bravely kept his attention on the black haired boy. "Everywhere else is full."

Sparing a glance at Cael, who nodded after staring at the new boy few moments and sniffing his scent, Harry shook his head and the boy sat down. He glanced at Harry and then looked quickly out of the window, pretending he hadn't looked. Harry saw he still had the black mark on his nose.

"Hey, Ron."

The twins were back.

"Listen, we're going down the middle of the train – Lee Jordan's got a giant tarantula down there."

"Right," mumbled Ron.

"Harry," said the other twin, "Did we introduce ourselves? Fred and George Weasley. And this is Ron, our brother. See you later, then."

"It was nice meeting you, too, Hikosu...er..." he paused when he saw Cael staring at them. He sniffed the twins' scent, but smirked, relaying to the two his name.

"And, er, Cael. Nice to meet you." One of the twins stammered. Apparently they were a bit unnerved by the whole situation.

"Bye," said Harry and Ron. Cael nodded to them and voiced Hikosu's farewell as the twins slid the compartment door shut behind them.

"Are you really Harry Potter?" Ron suddenly blurted out.

Harry nodded.

"And you – you're really Snape's daughter? And an Animalia?" he asked. Cael chuckled and the silver eyed girl silently giggled, looking up from her interesting book.

"I am here, am I not? Boy, I am an animal guide. What does that tell you? Use that head of yours for Harry could not possibly be an Animalia." The wolf-like male guffawed in good nature. Ron's face instantly turned red.

"Oh – well, I thought it might be one of Fred and George's jokes."  
Said Ron. "And have you really got – you know..."

He pointed at Harry's forehead.

Both Hikosu and Harry pulled back their bangs to show the matching lightning scars, but, of course, since Hikosu was not actually receiving the killing curse her scar was much lighter. If her skin was any lighter than it was then the scar would have blended right with it. Ron stared.

"So that's where You-Know\_Who -?"

"Yes," said Harry, "but we can't remember it."

"Nothing?" said Ron eagerly.

"Well – I remember a lot of green light, but nothing else. Hikosu doesn't remember anything."

"Wow," said Ron. He sat and stared at Harry for a few moments, then, as though he had suddenly realized what he was doing, he looked quickly out of the window again.

"Are all your family wizards?" asked Harry, who found Ron just as interesting as Ron found him. Although she was still reading her book she was half listening to Harry's conversation.

"Er – yes, I think so," said Ron. "I think mom's got a second cousin who's an accountant, but we never talk about him."

"So you must know loads of magic already."

The Weasleys were clearly one of those old wizarding families the pale boy in Diagon Alley had talked about.

"I've heard of your family, boy. A Weasley, are you? Good family with strong beliefs." And Cael grinned. Ron was becoming more comfortable with the animal guide and he showed so by sinking into his seat.

"I heard you two went to live with Muggles," said Ron. "What are they like?"

"Horrible – well, not all of them. My aunt and uncle and cousin are, though. Wish I'd had three wizard brothers."

"Five," said Ron. For some reason, he was looking gloomy. "I'm the sixth in our family to go to Hogwarts. You could say I've got a lot to live up to. Bill and Charlie have already left – Bill was head boy and Charlie was captain of Quidditch. Now Percy's a prefect. Fred and George mess around a lot, but they still get really good marks and everyone thinks they're really funny. Everyone expects me to do as well as the others, but if I do, it's no big deal, because they did it first. You never get anything new, either, with five brothers. I've got Bill's old robes, Charlie's old wand, and Percy's old rat."

Ron reached inside his jacket and pulled out a fat gray rat, which was asleep.

"His name's Scabbers and he's useless, he hardly ever wakes up. Percy got an owl from my dad for being made a prefect, but they couldn't aff- I mean, I got Scabbers instead."

Ron's ears went pink. He seemed to think he'd said too much, because he went back to staring out the window.

Harry didn't think there was anything wrong with not being able to afford an owl. After all, he'd never had any money in his life until a month ago, and he told Ron so, all about having to wear Dudley's old clothes and never getting proper birthday presents. This seemed to cheer Ron up.

"...and until Hagrid told me, I didn't know anything about being a wizard or about my parents or Voldemort –"

Ron gasped.

"What?" said Harry.

"You said You-Know-Who's name!" said Ron, sounding both shocked and impressed. "I'd have thought you, of all people –"

"I'm not trying to be brave or anything, saying the name," said Harry, "I just never knew you shouldn't. See what I mean? I've got loads to

learn...I bet," he added voicing for the first time something that had been worrying him a lot lately, "I bet I'm the worst in the class."

Harry...don't worry. I probably will have as much trouble learning magic as you will. Hikosu comforted, looking up from her book.

"You won't be. There's loads of people who come from Muggle families and they learn quick enough."

While they had been talking, the train had carried them out of London. Now they were speeding past fields full of cows and sheep. They were quiet for a time, watching the fields and lanes flick past.

Around half past twelve there was a great clattering outside in the corridor and a smiling, dimpled woman slid back their door and said, "Anything off the cart, dears?"

Harry, who hadn't had any breakfast, leapt to his feet, but Ron's ears went pink again and he muttered that he'd brought sandwiches. Harry went out into the corridor, followed quickly by the silver eyed girl. Cael stood in the doorway, keeping a watchful eye on his charge.

He had never had any money for candy with the Dursleys, and now that he had pockets rattling with gold and silver he was ready to buy as many Mars Bars as he could carry – but the woman didn't have Mars Bars. What she did have were Bertie Bott's Every Flavor Beans, Drooble's Best Blowing Gum, Chocolate Frogs, Pumpkin Pasties, Cauldron Cakes, Licorice Wands, and a number of other strange things Harry had never seen in his life. Not wanting to miss anything, he got some of everything and paid the woman eleven silver Sickles and seven bronze Knuts. He even refused to let Hikosu pay for her candy, but she was a sly witch; she slipped some money back into Harry's pocket when he wasn't looking, exchanging a smirk with her protector.

"Hungry, are you?"

"Starving," said Harry, taking a large bite out of a pumpkin pasty. He handed some to Hikosu, who thanked him, and she went back to her book. She was almost finished with it. A couple of more pages and she was done, handing the book to Cael. He put it with the rest of their things and stole a Pumpkin Pasty for himself.



Ron had taken out a lumpy package and unwrapped it. There were four sandwiches inside. He pulled one of them apart and said, "She always forgets I don't like corned beef."

"Swap you for one of these," said Harry, holding up a pasty. "Go on \_"

"You don't want this, it's all dry," said Ron. "She hasn't got much time," he added quickly, "You know, with five of us."

"Hikosu says to have a pasty or she'll shove it in your mouth, wrapper and all." Cael sniggered, while Harry snorted in amusement.

"Go on, have a pasty," said Harry, who had never had anything to share before or, indeed, anyone to share it with. It was a nice feeling, sitting there with Ron, Hikosu, and Cael, eating their way through all of their pasties, cakes, and candies (the sandwiches lay forgotten).

"What are these?" Harry asked Ron, holding up a pack of Chocolate Frogs. "They're not really frogs, are they?" He was starting to feel that nothing would surprise him. Hikosu looked at the one in Harry's hand and then snatched one from the enormous pile. She turned it over in her hands before opening it.

The frog made her scream, but Cael only laughed as he snatched it from her hand and ate it for himself.

Pig. She laughed, turning the card over in her hand. Apparently the person on the card was an Animalia wizard for Cael gasped out loud in recognition.

Cael? Do you know this person? She asked, cocking her head to the side.

I did. His name, which is on the card of course, was Selodin Wolfsbaine. He was a great man and my father was his animal guide. Voldemort murdered him after he found a cure for lycanthropy, but it was lost long ago. Nobody knows where it is. If you look on the back it has his information on it.

And she turned the card over it did, indeed, have Selodin Wolfsbaine's information on the back.

She read:

SELODIN WOLFSBAINE

Animalia

One of the most famous of the Animalia, Wolfsbaine

Is the creator of the only known cure for lycanthropy.

Unfortunately, the cure was lost when he was murdered

By He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. He possessed an animal

Guide, named Gawain, who took the guise of a wolf.

Wow. So your father's name is Gawain? Hikosu asked him. A sad look passed through Cael's eyes, but the look was gone as soon as it had come.

Was. His name was Gawain. He was murdered while protecting Master Wolfsbaine. They were both good men. Anyway, let's see which card Harry's got. Hikosu wanted to say more, but what could she say that would cheer him up?

"No, they're not real," said Ron. "But see what the card is. I'm missing Agrippa."

"What?"

"Oh, of course, you wouldn't know – Chocolate Frogs have cards inside them, you know, to collect – famous witches and wizards. I've got about five hundred, but I haven't got Agrippa or Ptolemy."

Harry unwrapped his Chocolate Frog and picked up the card. It showed a man's face. He wore half-moon glasses, had a long, crooked nose, and flowing silver hair, beard, and mustache. Underneath the picture was the name Albus Dumbledore.

"So this is Dumbledore!" said Harry. Hikosu jumped to her feet to look over Harry's shoulder. She smiled, approving of the cheerful face of the older man.

"Don't tell me you'd never heard of Dumbledore!" said Ron.

"Can I have a frog? I might get Agrippa – thanks –"

Harry turned his card over and read:

ALBUS DUMBLEDORE

Currently Headmaster of Hogwarts

Considered by many the greatest wizard of modern times,

Dumbledore is particularly famous for his defeat of the

Dark wizard Grindelwald in 1945, for the discovery of the

Twelve uses of dragon's blood, and his work on alchemy

With his partner, Nicholas Flamel. Professor Dumbledore

Enjoys chamber music and tenpin bowling.

Harry turned the card back over and saw, to his astonishment, that Dumbledore's face had disappeared.

"He's gone!"

"Well, you can't expect him to hang around all day," said Ron. "He'll be back. No, I've got Morgana again and I've got about six of her...do you want it? You can start collecting."

Ron's eyes strayed to the pile of Chocolate Frogs waiting to be unwrapped.

"Help yourself," said Harry. "But in, you know, the Muggle world, people just stay put in photos."

"Do they? What, they don't move at all?" Ron sounded amazed.

"Weird!"

Harry stared as Dumbledore sidled back into the picture on his card and gave him a small smile. Ron was more interested in eating the frogs than looking at the Famous Witches and Wizards cards, but

Harry couldn't keep his eyes off them. Soon he had not only Dumbledore and Morgana, but Hengist of Woodcroft, Alberic Grunnion, Circe, Paracelsus, and Merlin. He finally tore his eyes away from the druidess Cliodna, who was scratching her nose, to open a bag of Bertie Bott's Every Flavor Beans. Hikosu gave him her cards as well, only keeping those who had the title of Animalia.

"You want to be careful with those," Ron warned Harry. "When they say every flavor, they mean every flavor – you know, you get all the ordinary ones like chocolate and peppermint and marmalade, but then you can get spinach and liver and tripe. George recons he had a booger-flavored one once."

Ron picked up a green bean, looked at it carefully, and bit into a corner.

"Bleaaargh – see? Sprouts."

They had a good time eating Every Flavor Beans. Harry got toast, coconut, baked bean, strawberry, curry, grass, coffee, sardine, and was even brave enough to nibble the end off a funny gray one Ron wouldn't touch, which turned out to be pepper.

Hikosu tried a few as well but she, unfortunately, scored an earwax flavored bean. She also tasted lemon, chocolate, blueberry muffin, sugar, and they had a scare when one turned out to be hazelnut. Hikosu was allergic to all types of nuts, but just as soon as her throat began to swell Cael realized what was wrong. He instantly put his hand on her throat and muttered a spell, using a bit of healing magic only animal guides possessed. Her throat went back to normal, but the wolf-like male was forced to return to his wolf guise for the time being.

The countryside now flying past the window was becoming wilder. The neat fields had gone. Now there were woods, twisting rivers, and dark green hills.

There was a knock on the door of their compartment and the round-faced boy Harry had passed on platform nine and three-quarters came in. He looked tearful.

"Sorry," he said, "But have you seen a toad at all?"

When they shook their heads, he wailed, "I've lost him! He keeps getting away from me!"

"He'll turn up," said Harry.

"Yes," said the boy miserably. "Well, if you see him..."

He left.

"Don't know why he's so bothered," said Ron. "If I'd brought a toad I'd lose it as quick as I could. Mind you, I brought Scabbers, so I can't talk." Hikosu laughed silently, motioning towards Cael and petting his head. Cael snorted and rested his head in her lap, telling her to stop calling him a pet.

The rat was still snoozing on Ron's lap.

"He might have died and you wouldn't know the difference," said Ron in disgust. "I tried to turn him yellow yesterday to make him more interesting, but the spell didn't work. I'll show you, look..."

He rummaged around in his trunk and pulled out a very battered-looking wand. It was chipped in places and something white was glinting at the end.

"Unicorn's hair's nearly poking out. Anyway –"

He had just raised his wand when the compartment door slid open again. The toadless boy was back, but this time he had a girl with him. She was already wearing her new Hogwarts robes.

Cael raised his head and growled a warning to her, but she ignored it. The growl grew louder as his hackles raised and then, only then, did she stop in her tracks. The wolf animal guide sniffed her, concentrating on her hard, before he snorted. He nodded his head and laid it back down on Hikosu's lap.

"You're not allowed to have a dog." She said in a know-it-all voice.

"He's a wolf." Harry replied, slightly on edge.

"Well, still. You're not allowed to have one." She replied, glaring at the silver eyed girl.

Ron glared.

"Well she's allowed one when she's an Animalia and he's her animal guide." He retorted. She only stuck her nose into the air.

"Has anyone seen a toad? Nevelle's lost one," she said. She had a bossy sort of voice, lots of busy brown hair, and rather large front teeth.

"We've already told him we haven't seen it," said Ron, but the girl wasn't listening, she was looking at the wand in his hand.

"Oh, are you doing magic? Let's see it, then."

She sat down. Ron looked taken aback.

"Er – all right."

He cleared his throat.

"Sunshine, daisies, butter mellow,

Turn this stupid, fat rat yellow."

He waved his wand, but nothing happened. Scabbers stayed gray and fast asleep.

"Are you sure that's a real spell?" said the girl. "Well, it's not very good, is it? I've tried a few simple spells just for practice and it's all worked for me. nobody in my family's magic at all, it was ever such a surprise when I got my letter, but I was ever so pleased, of course, I mean it's the very best school of witchcraft there is, I've heard – I've learned all our course books by heart, of course, I just hope it will be enough – I'm Hermione Granger, by the way, who are you?"

She said this all very fast.

Harry looked at Ron, and was relieved to see by his stunned face that he hadn't learned all the course books by heart, either. Hikosu had only memorized the one about magical creatures...and potions. Severus Snape was the Potions Master after all.

"I'm Ron Weasley," Ron muttered.

"Harry Potter. She is Hikosu Snape and that's Cael, her animal guide." Said Harry.

"Are you two really?" said Hermione. "I know all about you two, of course, - I got a few extra books for background reading, and you're in Modern Magical History and The Rise and Fall of the Dark Arts and Great Wizarding Events of the Twentieth Century. Hikosu is in Powerful Magical Beings and Animalia of the New Age and Animalia: History of the Unknown. "

"Are we?" said Harry, feeling dazed. The silver eyed girl was looking a bit shocked as well.

I don't know...if I like her...that much. She's kind of annoying. Hikosu mumbled to both Cael and Harry.

"Goodness, didn't you know, I'd have found out everything I could if it was me" said Hermione. "Do either of you know what house you'll be in? I've been asking around, and I hope I'm in Gryffindor, it sounds by far the best; I hear Dumbledore himself was in it, but I suppose Ravenclaw wouldn't be too bad...Anyway, we'd better go and look for Neville's toad. You two had better change, you know, I expect we'll be there soon."

And she left, taking the toadless boy with her.

"Whatever house I'm in, I hope she's not in it," said Ron. He threw his wand back in his trunk. "Stupid spell – George gave it to me, bet he knew it was a dud."

"What house are your brothers in?" asked Harry.

"Gryffindor," said Ron. Gloom seemed to be settling on him again. "Mum and Dad were in it, too. I don't know what they'll say if I'm not. I don't suppose Ravenclaw would be too bad, but imagine if they put me in Slytherin."

"That's the house Vol-, I mean, You-Know-Who was in?"

"Yeah," said Ron. He flopped back into his seat, looking depressed.

"You know, I think the ends of Scabbers' whiskers are a bit lighter," said Harry, trying to take Ron's mind off houses. "So what do your oldest brothers do now that they've left, anyway?"

Harry was wondering what a wizard did once he'd finished school. Hikosu was wondering the same thing, but already she had her heart set on anything that had to do with magical creatures.

"Charlie's in Romania studying dragons, and Bill's in Africa doing something for Gringotts," said Ron. "Did you hear about Gringotts? It's been all over the Daily Prophet, but I don't suppose you get that with the muggles – someone tried to rob a high security vault."

Harry stared and Hikosu's eyes widened.

"Really? What happened to them?"

"Nothing, that's why it's such big news. They haven't been caught. My dad says it must've been a powerful Dark wizard to get round Gringotts, but they don't think they took anything, that's what'd odd. 'Course, everyone gets scared when something like this happens n case You-know-Who's behind it."

Harry turned this news over in his mind. He was starting to get a prickle of fear every time You-Know-Who was mentioned. He supposed this was all part of entering the magical world, but it had been a lot more comfortable saying "Voldemort" without worrying.

"What's your Quidditch team?" Ron asked.

What the bloody hell is quidditch? Hikosu asked, raising her eyebrow. Cael snorted, but refrained from explaining since the redheaded male would no doubt explain.

"Er- I don't know any," Harry confessed. The silver eyed girl shook her head as well.

"What!" Ron looked dumbfounded. "Oh, you wait, it's the best game in the world –" and he was off, explaining all about the four balls and the positions of the seven players, describing famous games he'd been to with his brothers and the broomstick he'd like to get if he had the money. He was just taking Harry through the finer points of



the game when the compartment door slid open yet again, but it wasn't Neville the toadless boy, or Hermione Granger this time.

Three boys entered, and Harry recognized the middle one at once: it was the pale boy from Madam Malkin's robe shop. He was looking at Harry with a lot more interest than he'd shown back in Diagon Alley.

"Is it true?" he said. "They're saying all down the train that Harry Potter and Hikosu SNAPE are this compartment. So it's you two, is it?"

"Yes," said Harry. Hikosu were merely glaring at the two of them. Cael was growling softly at the two boys who were standing behind the blond boy. Harry was also looking at the other boys. Both of them were thickset and looked extremely mean. Standing on either side of the pale boy, they looked like bodyguards.

"Oh, this is Crabbe and this is Goyle," said the pale boy carelessly, noticing where Harry and the large white wolf was looking. "And my name's Malfoy, Draco Malfoy."

Ron gave a slight cough, which might have been hiding a snigger. Draco Malfoy looked at him.

"Think my name's funny, do you? No need to ask who you are. My father told me all the Weasleys' have red hair, freckles, and more children than they can afford."

Hikosu let out a startled gasp and Cael started to growl even louder. His hackles were raised once again, showing his fangs to the three boys. The blond boy sneered at the wolf and narrowed his eyes at the girl sitting behind him.

Harry, I don't trust him. You and Hikosu should steer clear for him...at least for now. Cael warned.

He turned back to Harry. "You'll soon find out some wizarding families are much better than others, Potter. You don't want to go making friends with the wrong sort. I can help you there." He held out his hand to shake Harry's, but Harry didn't take it.

"I think I can tell who the wrong sort are for myself, thanks," he said coolly.

Draco Malfoy didn't go red, but a pink tinge appeared in his pale cheeks.

"I'd be careful if I were you, Potter," he said slowly. "Unless you're a bit politer you'll go the same way as your parents. They didn't know what was good for them, either. You hang around with riffraff like the Weasleys and that Hagrid, and it'll rub off on you...but little Hikosu. You're a different story. You'll most likely end up in Slytherin with us since your father is a Slytherin. I'll no doubt see you soon."

Both Harry and Ron stood up and tears welled in the silver eyed girl's eyes.

"Say that again," Ron said, his face as red as his hair.

"Oh, you're going to fight us, are you?" Malfoy sneered.

"Unless you get out now," said Harry, more bravely than he felt, because Crabbe and Goyle were a lot bigger than him or Ron. Cael stood and phased back to his humanoid form.

"You should leave, now." He calmly warned.

"But we don't feel like leaving, do we, boys? We've eaten all our food and you still seem to have some."

Goyle reached toward the Chocolate Frogs next to Ron – Ron leapt forward, but before he'd so much as touched Goyle, Goyle let out a horrible yell.

Scabbers the rat was hanging off his finger, sharp little teeth sunk deep into Goyle's knuckle – Crabbe and Malfoy backed away as Goyle swung Scabbers round and round, howling, and when Scabbers finally flew off and hit the window, all three of them disappeared at once. Perhaps they thought there were more rats lurking among the sweets, or perhaps they'd heard footsteps, because a second later, Hermione Granger had come in.

"What has been going on?" she said, looking at all the sweets all over the floor and Ron picking up Scabbers by his tail.

"I think he's been knocked out," Ron said to Harry. He looked closer at Scabbers. "No – I don't believe it – he's gone back to sleep."

And so he had.

"You've met Malfoy before?"

Harry explained about their meeting in Diagon Alley while Cael comforted the crying girl. Harry couldn't help feeling a bit jealous. He was the one who always comforted her before.

"I've heard of his family," said Ron darkly. "They were some of the first to come back to our side after You-Know-Who disappeared. Said they'd been bewitched. My dad doesn't believe it. He says Malfoy's father didn't need an excuse to go over to the Dark Side." He turned to Hermione. "Can we help you with something?"

"You'd better hurry up and put your robes on, I've just been up there to the front to ask the conductor, and he says we're nearly there. You haven't been fighting, have you? You'll be in trouble before we even get there!"

"Scabbers has been fighting, not us," said Ron, scowling at her. "Would you mind leaving while we change?"

"All right – I only came in here because people outside are behaving very childish, racing up and down the corridors," said Hermione in a sniffy voice. "and you've got dirt on your nose, by the way, did you know?"

Ron glared at her as she left. Harry peered out of the window. It was getting dark. He could see mountains and forests under a deep purple sky. The train did seem to be slowing down.

He and Ron took off their jackets and pulled on their long black robes. Ron's were a bit short for him, you could see her sneakers underneath them. The three males turned their backs while Hikosu pulled her robes on.

A voice echoed through the train: "We will be reaching Hogwarts in five minutes' time. Please leave your luggage on the train, it will be taken to the school separately."

Harry's stomach lurched with nerves and Ron, he saw, looked pale under his freckles. They crammed their pockets with the last of the sweets and, along with a nervous Hikosu and a calm Cael who was now in wolf form once again, joined the crowd thronging the corridor.

The train slowed right down and finally stopped. People pushed their way toward the door and out on to a tiny, dark platform. Harry shivered in the cold night air. Then a lamp came bobbing over the heads of the students, and Harry heard a familiar voice: "Firs' years! Firs' years over here! All right there, Harry? 'Kosu?"

Hagrid's big hairy face beamed over the sea of heads.

"C'mon, follow me – any more firs' years? Mind yer step, now! Firs' years follow me!"

Slipping and stumbling, they followed Hagrid down what seemed to be a steep, narrow path. It was so dark on either side of them that Harry thought there must be thick trees there. Nobody spoke much. Neville, the boy who kept losing his toad, sniffed once or twice. Once Hikosu had slipped Cael made her ride him to the boats. A couple of people laughed at her, pointing at her crimson face.

"Yeh'll get yer firs' sight o' Hogwarts in a sec," Hagrid called over his shoulder, "Jus' round this bend here."

There was a loud "Ooooooh!"

The narrow path had opened suddenly onto the edge of a great black lake. Perched atop a high mountain on the other side, its windows sparkling in the starry sky, was a vast castle with many turrets and towers.

"No more'n four to a boat!" Hagrid called, pointing to a fleet of little boats sitting in the water by the shore. Harry and Ron were followed into their boat by Hikosu and Cael.

"Everyone in?" shouted Hagrid, who had a boat to himself. "Right then – FORWARD!"

And the fleet of little boats moved off all at once, gliding across the lake, which was as smooth as glass. Everyone was silent, staring up

at the great castle overhead. It towered over them as they sailed nearer and nearer to the cliff on which it stood.

"Heads down!" yelled Hagrid as the first boats reached the cliff; they all bent their heads and the little boats carried them through a curtain of ivy that hid a wide opening in the cliff face. They were carried along a dark tunnel, which seemed to be taking them right underneath the castle, until they reached a kind of underground harbor, where they clambered out onto the rocks and pebbles.

"Oy, you there! Is this your toad?" said Hagrid, who was checking the boats as people climbed out of them.

"Trevor!" cried Neville blissfully, holding out his hands. then they clambered up a passageway in the rock after Hagrid's lamp, coming out at last onto smooth, damp grass right in the shadow of the castle.

They walked up a flight of stone steps and crowded around the huge, oak front door.

"Everyone here? You there, still got yer toad?"

Hagrid raised a gigantic fist and knocked three times on the castle door.

Hey guys! I'm back for now! My midterm is tomorrow =D and I have two weeks left in summer school. French is cool, my professor is kind of...odd yet fun to say the least.

Anything Harry Potter related belongs to JK Rowling! I only own Arista, Hikosu, Cael, and I still can't remember Arista's animal guide's name...

ADHD CrazyDayDreamer . Forever - Here is your update. Hope you like it.

Blackoutpanther - I'm glad you like my story so much!

Raine44354 - Aww, I was missed! That makes me uber happy.

DearPrudenceGirHasGoneMad22 - I'm glad you still like it. I'm having fun with this story.

PS I DO KNOW THAT SEVERUS SNAPE IS SERIOUSLY OUT OF CHARACTER. HE WILL CONTINUE TO BE OUT OF CHARACTER FOR THE REST OF THE SERIES.

## Chapter Seven

### The Sorting Hat

The door swung open at once. A tall, black-haired witch in emerald-green robes stood there. She had a very stern face and Harry's first thought was that this was not someone to cross. He shared a look with the silver eyed girl standing next to him and secretly smiled when she took his hand in hers. Cael nodded his head to the woman, who nodded back with a small smile. The woman knew that there hadn't been an Animalia at Hogwarts for the past several hundred years.

Of course she knew others who had attended magical schools. Arista had attended school in America – Salem Academy for Magical Beings – so she knew that there were other schools that accepted Animalia. The young silver eyed girl before her held promise – that much she could see - but to think that she was actually Professor Snape's daughter.

"The firs' years, Professor McGonagall," said Hagrid.

"Thank you, Hagrid. I will take them from here."

She pulled the door wide. The entrance hall was so big you could have fit the whole of the Dursley's house in it. The stone walls were lit with flaming torches like the ones at Gringotts, the ceiling was too high to make out, and a magnificent marble staircase facing them led to the upper floors.

They followed Professor McGonagall across the flagged stone floor. Harry could hear the drone of hundreds of voices from a doorway to the right – the rest of the school must already be here – but Professor McGonagall showed the first years into a small, empty chamber off the hall. They crowded in, standing rather closer together than they would usually have done, peering about nervously.

Harry and Hikosu were still holding hands, but they were calming each other down. Cael was standing next to the silver eyed girl in his wolf form so that he wouldn't draw as much attention. His one worry was that Hikosu wouldn't be sorted into a house. The last Animalia who had gone to Hogwarts had not been sorted into a house, rather he had been given his own quarters with an attached room for his animal guide. His robes were black with white outlines and his tie was white and black. His name was Selodin Wolfsbaine and his animal guide was his father.

Hikosu was similar to Selodin in some ways, but the wolf animal guide was not sure if she would end up belonging to Hogwarts itself or one of the Houses.

"Welcome to Hogwarts," said Professor McGonagall. "The start-of-term banquet will begin shortly, but before you take your seats in the Great Hall, you will be sorted into your houses. The Sorting is a very important ceremony because, while you are here, your house will be something like your family within Hogwarts. You will have classes with the rest of your house, sleep in your house dormitory, and spend free time in your house common room.

"The four houses are called Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw, and Slytherin. Each house has its own noble history and each has produced outstanding witches and wizards. While you are at Hogwarts, your triumphs will earn your house points, while any rule-

breaking will lose house points. At the end of the year, the house with the most points is awarded the house cup, a great honor. I hope each of you will be a credit to whichever house becomes yours.

"The Sorting Ceremony will take place in a few minutes in front of the rest of the school. I suggest you all smarten yourselves up as much as you can while you are waiting."

Her eyes lingered for a moment on Neville's cloak, which was fastened under his left ear, and on Ron's smudged nose. Harry nervously tried to flatten his hair.

"I shall return when we are ready or you," said Professor McGonagall. "Please wait quietly."

She left the chamber. Harry swallowed, but the silver eyed girl next to him gave him a reassuring smile. She squeezed the hand she was holding, letting the green eyed boy know that she was there for him even though she was feeling the same amount of nervousness.

"How exactly do they sort us into houses?" he asked Ron.

"Some sort of test, I think. Fred said it hurts a lot, but I think he was joking."

A test? What kind of test? Oh, bloody hell, now I'm nervous! Hikosu quietly thought, most likely not meaning to send it to Harry. He heard what she was thinking and absentmindedly starting to rub circles on the back of her hand. He felt better knowing that they were both nervous, but then it was past the whole point. He was still nervous!

Harry's heart gave a horrible jolt. They were taking a test? In front of the whole school? But he didn't know any magic yet – what on Earth would he have to do? He hadn't expected something like this the moment they arrived. He looked around anxiously and saw that everyone else looked terrified, too. That made him feel a little better and having his best friend by his side was calming him considerably. He just hoped he didn't make a fool of himself in front of her.

No one was talking much except Hermione Granger, who was whispering very fast about all the spells she'd learned and wondered which one she'd need. Harry tried hard not to listen to her. He'd never been more nervous, never, not even when he'd had to take a



school report home to the Dursleys saying that he'd somehow turned his teacher's wig blue. He kept his eyes fixed on the door. Any second now, Professor McGonagall would come back and lead him to his doom.

Then something happened that made him jump about a foot in the air – several people behind him screamed.

"What the -?"

He gasped and Hikosu would have screamed if she could. She latched onto him and buried her face into his side. The people around them had gasped as well. About twenty ghosts had just streamed through the back wall. Pearly-white and slightly transparent, they glided across the room talking to one another and hardly glancing at the first years.

The silver eyed girl was shaking uncontrollably and neither Harry nor Cael could figure out what was going on until, like a light bulb turning on, they remembered that she was afraid of ghosts. The ghosts in question seemed to be arguing. What looked like a fat little monk was saying: "Forgive and forget, I say, we ought to give him a second chance –"

"My dear Friar, haven't we given Peeves all the chances he deserves? He gives us all a bad name and you know he's not really even a ghost – I say, what are you all doing here?"

A ghost wearing a ruff and tights had suddenly noticed the first years.

Nobody answered

"New students!" said the Fat Friar, smiling around at them. "About to be Sorted, I suppose?"

A few people nodded mutely.

"Hope to see you in Hufflepuff!" said the Friar. "My old house, you know."

"Move along now," said a sharp voice. "The Sorting Ceremony's about to start."

Professor McGonagall had returned. One by one, the ghosts floated away through the opposite wall.

"Now, form a line," Professor McGonagall told the first years, "and follow me."

Feeling oddly as though his legs had turned to lead, Harry got into the line behind a boy with sandy hair, with Hikosu directly behind him and Ron behind her, and they walked out the chamber, back across the hall, and through a pair of double doors into the Great Hall. Cael walked beside Hikosu with his head held high.

Harry had never even imagined such a strange and splendid place. It was lit by thousands and thousands of candles that were floating in midair over four long tables, where the rest of the students were sitting. These tables were laid with glittering golden plates and goblets. At the top of the hall was another long table where the teachers were sitting. Professor McGonagall led the first years up here, so that they came to a halt in a line facing the other students, with the teachers behind them. The hundreds of faces staring at them looked like pale lanterns in the flickering candlelight. Dotted here and there among the students, the ghosts shone misty silver. Mainly to avoid all the staring eyes, Harry looked upward and saw a velvety black ceiling dotted with stars. He heard Hermione whisper, "It's bewitched to look like the sky outside. I read about it in *Hogwarts, A History*."

It was hard to believe there was a ceiling there at all, and that the Great Hall didn't simply open on to the heavens.

Harry quickly looked down again as Professor McGonagall silently placed a four-legged stool in front of the first years. On top of the stool she put a pointed wizard's hat. This hat was patched and frayed and extremely dirty. Aunt Petunia wouldn't have let it in the house.

Maybe they had to try to get a rabbit out of it, Harry thought wildly, that seemed the sort of thing – noticing that everyone in the hall was now staring at the hat, he stared at it, too.

Don't be silly, Harry. I can...feel the magic coming off of it. The hat, I mean. Hikosu absentmindedly explained. For a few seconds, there was complete silence. Then the hat twitched. A rip near the brim

opened wide like a mouth – and the hat began to sing:

"Oh, you may not think I'm pretty,

But don't judge on what you see,

I'll eat myself if you can find

A smarter hat than me.

You can keep your bowlers black,

Your top hats sleek and tall,

For I'm the Hogwarts Sorting Hat

And I can cap them all.

There's nothing hidden in your head

The Sorting Hat can't see,

So try me on and I will tell you

Where you ought to be.

You might belong in Gryffindor,

Where dwell the brave at heart,

Their daring, nerve, and chivalry

Set Gryffindors apart;

You might belong in Hufflepuff,

Where they are just and loyal,

Those patient Hufflepuffs are true

And unafraid of toil;

Or yet in wise old Ravenclaw,  
If you've a ready mind,  
Where those of wit and learning,  
Will always find their kind;  
Or perhaps in Slytherin  
You'll make your real friends,  
Those cunning folk use any means  
To achieve their ends.  
Or be you Animalia with friends all around,  
Neither of the four houses you belong  
You, the ones born from magic of the ground,  
The ones where the purist magic makes you strong.  
So put me on! Don't be afraid!  
And don't get in a flap!  
You're in safe hands (though I have none)  
For I'm a Thinking Cap!"

The whole hall burst into applause as the hat finished its song. It bowed to each of the four tables and then became quite still again.

"So we've just got to try on the hat!" Ron whispered to Harry. "I'll kill Fred, he was going on about wrestling a troll."

Harry smiled weakly. Yes, trying on the hat was a lot better than having to do a spell, but he did wish they could have tried it on without everyone watching. The hat seemed to be asking rather a lot; Harry didn't feel brave or quick-witted or any of it at the moment.

If only the hat had mentioned a house for people who felt a bit queasy, that would have been the one for him.

I don't like the sounds of that song. What did the hat mean by the fact that Animalia don't belong in any of the houses? The silver eyed girl next to Harry hesitantly asked. It was Harry this time that squeezed her hand to reassure her. Neither of them could say anything else because it was time to be Sorted.

Professor McGonagall now stepped forward holding a long roll of parchment.

"When I call your name, you will put on the hat and sit on the stool to be sorted," she said. "Abbott, Hannah!"

A pink-faced girl with blonde pigtails stumbled out of line, put on the hat, which fell right down over her eyes and sat down. A moment's pause –

"HUFFLEPUFF!" shouted the hat.

The table on the right cheered and clapped as Hannah went to sit down at the Hufflepuff table. Harry saw the ghost of the Fat Friar waving merrily at her.

"Bones, Susan!"

"HUFFLEPUFF!" shouted the hat again, and Susan scuttled off to sit next to Hannah.

"Boot, Terry!"

"RAVENCLAW!"

The table second from the left clapped this time; several Ravenclaws stood up to shake hands with Terry as he joined them.

"Brocklehurst, Mandy" went to Ravenclaw too, but "Brown, Lavender" became the first new Gryffindor, and the table on the far left exploded with cheers; Harry could see Ron's twin brothers cat-calling.

"Bulstrode, Millicent" then became a Slytherin. Perhaps it was Harry's imagination, after all he'd heard about Slytherin, but he thought they looked like an unpleasant lot. He could feel Hikosu's trembling hand in his and out of the corner of his eye he could see Cael nuzzling his nose into her robes, but she was still a trembling mess.

He was starting to feel definitely sick now. He remembered being picked for teams during gym at his old school. The two of them had always been last to be chosen, not because they were no good, but because no one wanted Dudley to think they liked them.

"Finch-Fletchley, Justin!"

"HUFFLEPUFF!"

Sometimes, the two of them noticed, the hat shouted out the house at once, but at others it took a little while to decide. "Finnigan, Seamus," the sandy-haired boy next to Harry in the line, sat on the stool for almost a whole minute before the hat declared him a Gryffindor.

"Granger, Hermione!"

Hermione almost ran to the stool and jammed the hat eagerly on her head.

"GRYFFINDOR!" Shouted the hat. Ron groaned.

A horrible thought struck Harry, as horrible thoughts always do when you're very nervous. What if he wasn't chosen at all? What if he just sat there with the hat over his eyes for ages, until Professor McGonagall jerked it off his head and said there had obviously been a mistake and he'd better get back on the train? He felt his hand being squeezed; it seemed like all the two of them could do was comfort each other in their time of need.

When Neville Longbottom, the boy who kept losing his toad, was called, he fell over on his way to the stool. The hat took a long time to decide with Neville. When it finally shouted "GRYFFINDOR," Neville ran off still wearing it, and had to jog back amid gales of laughter to give it to "MacDougal, Morag."

Malfoy swaggered forward when his name was called and got his wish at once: the hat had barely touched his head when it screamed, "SLYTHERIN!"

Malfoy went to join his friends Crabbe and Goyle, looking pleased with himself.

There weren't many people left now.

"Moon"..., "Nott"..., "Parkinson"..., then a pair of twin girls, "Patil" and "Patil"..., then "Perks, Sally-Anne"..., and then at last –

"Potter, Harry!"

As Harry stepped forward, whispers suddenly broke out like little hissing fires all over the hall. Before he went to the hat, Hikosu pulled him back and gave him a soft kiss on the cheek.

Wherever we end up, Harry, you'll always be my best friend. She whispered in his mind. It was then that the bond they formed with their hands was finally broken.

"Potter, did she say?"

"The Harry Potter?"

The last thing Harry saw before the hat dropped over his eyes was the hall full of people craning to get a good look at him. Next second he was looking at the black inside of the hat. He waited.

"Hmm," said a small voice in his ear. "Difficult. Very difficult. Plenty of courage, I see. Not a bad mind either. There's talent, oh my goodness, yes – and a nice thirst to prove yourself, now that's interesting...so where shall I put you?"

Harry gripped the edges of the stool and thought, Not Slytherin, not Slytherin. I want to prove to Hikosu that I'm better than those Slytherings. I don't want it. No. not Slytherin. Anything but Slytherin!

"Not Slytherin, eh?" said the small voice. "Are you sure? You could be great, you know, it's all here in your head, and Slytherin will help you on the way to greatness, no doubt about that. No? Well, if you're sure – better be GRYFFINDOR!"

Harry heard the hat shout the last word to the whole hall. He took off the hat and walked shakily toward the Gryffindor table. He was so relieved to have been chosen and not put in Slytherin, he hardly noticed that he was getting the loudest cheer yet. Percy the Prefect got up and shook his hand vigorously, while the Weasley twins yelled, "We got Potter! We got Potter!" Harry sat down opposite the ghost in the ruff he'd seen earlier. The ghost patted his arm, giving Harry the sudden, horrible feeling he'd just plunged it into a bucket of ice-cold water.

He could see the High Table properly now. At the end nearest him sat Hagrid, who caught his eye and gave him the thumbs up. Harry grinned back. And there, in the center of the High Table, in a large gold chair, sat Albus Dumbledore. Harry recognized him at once from the card he'd gotten out of the Chocolate Frog on the train. Dumbledore's silver hair was the only thing in the whole hall that shone as brightly as the ghosts. Harry spotted Professor Quirrell, too, the nervous young man from the Leaky Cauldron. He was looking very peculiar in a large purple turban.

And now there were only four people left to be sorted. Hikosu was standing shock still beside Cael, who was dutifully standing with his head underneath her small hand. The white of his fur contrasted completely with the black of her robes. Harry watched in worry as the next person was called. What if she wasn't sorted into Gryffindor? What did the sorting hat mean when she wouldn't be sorted into any houses?

"Thomas, Dean," a black boy even taller than Ron, joined Harry at the Gryffindor table. Now Harry was confused. Wasn't the Sorting in alphabetical order? "Turpin, Lisa," became a Ravenclaw and then it was Ron's turn. He was pale green by now. Harry crossed his fingers under the table and a second later the hat had shouted, "GRYFFINDOR!"

Harry clapped loudly with the rest as Ron collapsed into the chair next to him.

"Well done, Ron, excellent," said Percy Weasley pompously across Harry as "Zabini, Blaise," was made a Slytherin. Now Hikosu was standing all alone in the middle of the Great Hall all by herself, with



Cael by her side. Professor McGonagall had a small smile on her face as she rolled up her scroll.

"It is a proud day, indeed, when an Animalia becomes a student at Hogwarts. Snape, Hikosu, please be Sorted." The Transfiguration professor said, ushering the silver eyed girl to put the hat on her head. Cael sat by her side as the hat talked to her.

"Hm...you are a unique one, aren't you. A thirst for knowledge that Ravenclaws would be proud of, but only for Potions and Care of Magical Creatures. Shame." The hat began to think aloud, although only she and Cael were able to hear it.

"Now...an extreme sense of loyalty that would make Hufflepuffs shine, but only towards those select few loved ones. Shame again." The voice of the Sorting Hat continued to think aloud in her head. It seemed like it was finding great things in her personality, but then with each great thing came a certain personality flaw.

"My, my. I see the cunning usually reserved for Slytherins, but only applied for pranks and games. A definite shame. You would have done well in Slytherin if only you used your cunning for a bit...darker purposes." He said and Hikosu's silver eyes darkened in anger. Like hell she would use her cunning for dark doings.

"My dear, you possess the bravery shown only in Gryffindors, but only when your loved ones are in danger..." the Sorting Hat let out a great sigh.

"I believe I am at an impasse. You possess strengths and weakness, but you are equal in each. There is no house to put you in. You do not belong to just a house, but you belong to the magic that lives in Hogwart's very existence." He explained. Hikosu's eyes widened before the hat gave its answer.

"HOGWARTS SCHOOL OF WITCHCRAFT AND WIZARDRY!" the great hat cried and a beaming smile spread across the Transfiguration professor's face. She swiftly took the hat from Hikosu's head and the entire hall went silent.

The older woman told the silver eyed girl to stand, even though said girl was as confused as hell, and had her face the school.

"She belongs to none but the school. She, like the ones before her, has no particular house to where she belongs. Her magic is pure so the school of Hogwarts is her House." She said, placing a hand on her shoulder. The confused girl looked up at the teacher and the woman motioned for her to follow her out the door to the side. Cael followed the two of them out the door and once they were gone the whispers started up again.

The green eyed boy looked troubled as the professor led his best friend away. If she didn't belong to a house then where would she eat? Where would she sleep? He was worried, but he supposed there was nothing he could do about it for now. He looked down at his empty gold plate. He had only just realized how hungry he was. The pumpkin pasties seemed ages ago.

Albus Dumbledore had gotten to his feet. He was beaming at the students, his arms opened wide, as if nothing could have pleased him more than to see them all there.

"Welcome!" he said. "Welcome to a new year at Hogwarts! I must say that it is an honor to have an Animalia at Hogwarts. Before we begin our banquet, I would like to say a few words. And here they are: Nitwit! Blubber! Oddment! Tweak! Thank You!"

He sat back down. Everybody clapped and cheered. Harry didn't know whether to laugh or not.

"Is he – a bit mad?" he asked Percy uncertainly.

"Mad?" said Percy airily. "He's a genius! Best wizard in the world! But he is a bit mad, yes. Potatoes, Harry?"

Harry's mouth fell open. The dishes in front of him were now piled with food. He had never seen so many things he liked to eat on one table: roast beef, roast chicken, pork chops and lamb chops, sausages, bacon and steak, boiled potatoes, roast potatoes, fries, Yorkshire pudding, peas, carrots, gravy, ketchup, and, for some strange reason, peppermint humbugs.

The Dursleys had never exactly starved Harry, but he'd never been allowed to eat as much as he liked. Dudley had always taken anything that Harry really wanted, even if it made him sick. Harry

piled his plate with a bit of everything except the peppermints and began to eat. It was all delicious.

"That does look good," said the ghost in the ruff sadly, watching Harry cut up his steak.

"Can't you –?"

"I haven't eaten for nearly four hundred years," said the ghost. "I don't need to, of course, but one does miss it. I don't think I've introduced myself? Sir Nicholas de Mimsy-Porpington at your service. Resident ghost of Gryffindor Tower."

"I know who you are!" said Ron suddenly. "My brothers told me about you – you're Nearly Headless Nick!"

"I would prefer you to call me Sir Nicholas de Mimsy –" the ghost began stiffly, but sandy-haired Seamus Finnigan interrupted.

"Nearly Headless? How can you be nearly headless?"

Sir Nicholas looked extremely miffed, as if their little chat wasn't going at all the way he wanted.

"Like this," he said irritably. He seized his left ear and pulled. His whole head swung off his neck and fell onto his shoulder as if it was on a hinge. Someone had obviously tried to behead him, but not done it properly. Looking pleased at the stunned looks on their faces, Nearly Headless Nick flipped his head back onto his neck, coughed, and said, "So-new Gryffindors! I hope you're going to help us with the house championship this year? Gryffindors have never gone so long without winning. Slytherins have got the cup six years in a row! The Bloody Baron's becoming almost unbearable – he's the Slytherin ghost."

Harry looked over at the Slytherin table and saw a horrible ghost sitting there, with blank staring eyes, a gaunt face, and robes stained with silver blood. He was right next to Malfoy who, Harry was pleased to see, didn't look too pleased with the seating arrangements.

"How did he get covered in blood?" asked Seamus with great interest.

"I've never asked," said Nearly Headless Nick delicately.

When everyone had eaten as much as they could, the remains of the food faded from the plates, leaving them sparkling clean as before. A moment later the desserts appeared. Blocks of ice cream in every flavor you could think of, apple pies, treacle tarts, chocolate éclairs and jam doughnuts, trifle, strawberries, Jell-O, rice pudding...

As Harry helped himself to a treacle tart, the talk turned to their families.

"I'm half-and-half," said Seamus. "Me dad's a Muggle. Mom didn't tell him she was a witch 'til after they were married. Bit of a nasty shock for him."

The others laughed.

"What about you, Neville?" said Ron.

"Well, my gran brought me up and she's a witch," said Neville, "but the family thought I was all-Muggle for ages. My Great Uncle Algie kept trying to catch me off my guard and force some magic out of me – he pushed me off the end of Blackpool pier once, I nearly drowned – but nothing happened until I was eight. Great Uncle Algie came round for dinner, and he was hanging me out of an upstairs window by the ankles when my Great Auntie Enid offered him a meringue and he accidentally let go. But I bounced – all the way down the garden and into the road. They were all really pleased, Gran was crying, she was so happy. And you should have seen their faces when I got in here – they thought I might not be magic enough to come, you see. Great Uncle Algie was so pleased he bought me my toad."

On Harry's other side, Percy Weasley and Hermione were talking about lessons ("I do hope they start right away, there's so much to learn, I'm particularly interested in Transfiguration, you know, turning something into something else, of course, it's supposed to be very difficult –"; "You'll be starting small, just matches into needles and that sort of thing –").

Harry, who was starting to feel warm and sleepy, looked up at the High Table again. Hagrid was drinking deeply from his goblet.

Professor McGonagall was talking to Professor Dumbledore. Professor Quirrell, in his absurd turban, was talking to a teacher with greasy black hair, a hooked nose, and sallow skin.

It happened very suddenly. The hook-nosed teacher looked past Quirrell's turban straight into Harry's eyes – and a sharp, hot pain shot across the scar on Harry's forehead.

"Ouch!" Harry clapped a hand to his head.

"What is it?" asked Percy.

"N-nothing."

The pain had gone as quickly as it had come. Harder to shake off with the feeling Harry had gotten from the teacher's look – a feeling that he didn't like Harry at all.

"Who's that teacher talking to Professor Quirrell?" he asked Percy.

"Oh, you know Quirrell already, do you? No wonder he's looking so nervous, that's Professor Snape, Hikosu's father. He teaches Potions, but he doesn't want to – everyone knows he's after Quirrell's job. Knows an awful lot about the Dark Arts, Snape."

Harry watched Snape for a while, but Snape didn't look at him again. He didn't really like the feeling. If anything, the dark teacher had a light hearted look in his eye – as if he finally regained something he had lost for a very long time. The green eyed boy supposed it was true; he had been robbed of Hikosu for twelve years. He had never had the chance to raise her or teach her how to talk...to explain any of this magic stuff to her...or anything.

No, Harry decided that Professor Snape wasn't really a bad person. Perhaps it was just his way of dealing with the loss of his daughter. Suddenly, Professor Snape bid the rest of the table goodnight and stood, hurrying out of the same side door that the Transfiguration professor led Hikosu and Cael out of.

At last, the desserts too disappeared, and Professor Dumbledore got to his feet again. The hall fell silent.

"Ahem – just a few more words now that we are all fed and watered. I have a few start-of-term notices to give you. First years should note that the forest on the grounds is forbidden to all pupils. And a few of our older students would do well to remember that as well."

Dumbledore's twinkling eyes flashed in the direction of the Weasley twins.

"I have also been asked by Mr. Filch, the caretaker, to remind you all that no magic should be used between classes in the corridors. Quidditch trials will be held in the second week of term. Anyone interested in playing for their house teams should contact Madam Hooch. And finally, I must tell you that this year, the third-floor corridor on the right-hand side is out of bounds to everyone who does not wish to die a very painful death."

Harry laughed, but he was one of the few who did.

"He's not serious?" he muttered to Percy.

"Must be," said Percy, frowning at Dumbledore. "It's odd, because he usually gives us a reason why we're not allowed to go somewhere – the forest's full of dangerous beasts, everyone knows that. I do think he might have told us prefects, at least."

"And now, before we go to bed, let us sing the school song!" cried Dumbledore. Harry noticed that the other teachers' smiles had become rather fixated.

Dumbledore gave his wand a little flick, as if he was trying to get a fly off the end, and a long golden ribbon flew out of it, which rose high above the tables and twisted itself, snakelike, into words.

"Everyone pick their favorite tune," said Dumbledore, "and off we go!"

And the school bellowed:

"Hogwarts, Hogwarts, Hoggy Warty Hogwarts,

Teach us something please,

Whether we be old and bald

Or young with scabby knees,  
Our head could do with filling  
With some interesting stuff,  
For now they're bare and full of air,  
Dead flies and bits of fluff,  
So teach us things worth knowing,  
Bring back what we've forgot,  
Just do your best, we'll do the rest,  
And learn until our brains all rot."

Everybody finished the song at different times. At last, only the Weasley twins were left singing along to a very slow funeral march. Dumbledore conducted their last few lines with his wand and when they had finished, he was one of those who clapped the loudest.

"Ah, music," he said, wiping his eyes. "A magic beyond all we do here! And now, bedtime. Off you trot!"

The Gryffindore first years followed Percy through the chattering crowds, out of the Great Hall, and up the marble staircase. Harry's legs were like lead again, but only because he was so tired and full of food. He was too sleepy even to be surprised that the people in the portraits along the corridors whispered and pointed as they passed, or that twice Percy led them through doorways hidden behind sliding panels and hanging tapestries. They climbed staircases, yawning and dragging their feet, and Harry was just wondering how much farther they had to go when they came to a sudden halt.

A bundle of walking sticks was floating in midair ahead of them, and as Percy took a step toward them they started throwing themselves at him.

"Peeves," Percy whispered to the first years. "A poltergeist." He raised his voice, "Peeves – show yourself."

A loud, rude sound, like the air being let out of a balloon, answered.

"Do you want me to go to the Bloody Baron?"

There was a pop, and a little man with wicked, dark eyes and a wide mouth appeared, floating cross-legged in the air, clutching the walking sticks.

"Oooooooh!" he said, with an evil cackle. "Ickle Firsties! What fun!"

He swooped suddenly at them. They all ducked.

"Go away, Peeves, or the Baron'll hear about this, I mean it!" barked Percy.

Peeves stuck out his tongue and vanished, dropping the walking sticks on Neville's head. They heard him zooming away, rattling coats of armor as he passed.

"You want to watch out for Peeves," said Percy, as they set off again. "The Bloody Baron's the only one who can control him, he won't even listen to us prefects. Here we are."

At the very end of the corridor hung a portrait of a very fat woman in a pink silk dress.

"Password?" she said.

"Caput Draconis," said Percy, and the portrait swung forward to reveal a round hole in the wall. They all scrambled through it – Neville needed a leg up – and found themselves in the Gryffindor common room, a cozy, round room full of squashy armchairs.

Percy directed the girls through one door to their dormitory and the boys through another. At the top of a spiral staircase – they were obviously in one of the towers – they found their beds at last: five four-posters hung with deep red, velvet curtains. Their trunks had already been brought up. Too tired to talk much, they pulled on their pajamas and fell into bed.



"Great food, isn't it?" Ron muttered to Harry through the hangings. "Get off, Scabbers! He's chewing my sheets."

Harry was going to ask Ron if he'd had any of the treacle tart, but he fell asleep almost at once.

Perhaps Harry had eaten a bit too much, because he had a very strange dream. He was wearing Professor Quirrell's turban, which kept talking to him, telling him he must transfer to Slytherin at once, because it was his destiny. Harry told the turban he didn't want to be in Slytherin; it got heavier and heavier; he tried to pull it off but it tightened painfully – and there was Malfoy, laughing at him as he struggled with it – then Malfoy turned to the hook-nosed teacher, Snape, whose laugh became high and cold – there was a burst of green light and Harry woke, sweating and shaking.

He rolled over and fell asleep again, and when he woke the next day, he didn't remember the dream at all.

Meanwhile, while Harry was eating dinner, up in one of the highest towers of the castle, sat Dumbledore's office. Professor McGonagall, who Hikosu found out was the Deputy Headmistress as well, led her there in place of going to dinner. Perhaps they were going to explain what happens when they weren't in a certain house? She hoped so because the silver eyed girl was seriously confused.

The dark haired woman waved her wand and conjured three chairs, one was obviously for Cael since he had phased from wolf form to his hybrid form. He sat down in the chair and scooted it so that it was closer to his charge.

The Transfiguration professor also conjured up some sandwiches for them to eat while they were waiting for someone. About twenty minutes later a man dressed in black robes, had greasy-looking black hair, and a dark persona entered the office.

"H-Hikosu?" he asked, voice very quiet. Said girl's eyes widened dramatically before she stood, walking toward the one who said her name. He stilled, letting the silver eyed girl approach him. A flash of recognition entered her eyes as he pulled out half of a necklace...half of a broken locket to be precise.

"Hikosu...my little one." The man said.

"Severus, now is not the time. We must wait for Dumbledore so we can explain the rules of her house to her." The woman explained from where she was standing.

"Don't tell me what I can or cannot do concerning my daughter, Minerva!" he snapped, gaze instantly softening when he turned back to his daughter. Her eyes were wide, but it was because she had just realized that the missing piece of her locket was hanging from around the stranger's throat.

Papa? Hikosu asked with a quiet voice, coming to stand in front of the dark man. He kneeled in front of the girl and connected their locket. It was a perfect fit. He was a skilled mind reader, so he was able to hear the small voice projected from his daughter's mind.

"Yes, my dear." Severus Snape whispered, drawing her in for a hug. She didn't hesitate and launched herself into her father's arms. Behind them Cael was sitting quietly in his chair with a soft smile on his face while Professor McGonagall was openmouthed at Severus' odd behavior. Perhaps it was the beginning of change...or maybe his true personality was covered up by the anguish he felt when his daughter was missing and he lashed out at his students to release his emotions?

Severus picked up his little girl and sat in the third chair with his daughter in his lap. She was sitting with her arms wrapped around his neck and her face buried in his robes; he had his chin and face buried in her hair and his arms were wrapped securely around her tiny waist.

Papa? she asked quietly.

"Yes, sweetheart?" he responded, just as quietly.

Do you hate me? Is that why I had to live with Harry? at this question Severus stiffened considerably. His daughter thought he hated him? His heart gave a mighty wrench in his chest and tears came to his eyes. The Potions Master couldn't remember a time when he had been so emotional...except at Lily's funeral. Two tears ran down his pale cheeks as he pulled his daughter back to look her in the eyes.

"Hikosu. I want you to know that I could never hate you. I love you...with all my heart." It was true. He loved his little girl with everything he had. She was the only thing he had left. The silver eyed girl smiled widely and buried her face back into his black robes. Not another moment passed before the door to the office opened again, this time revealing the aged form of the Headmaster.

"Aah, Miss Snape. It really is a shame that Arista isn't here to see you as a fine young lady." The headmaster said.

"I will be short and to the point, because I'm fairly sure that Miss Snape, here, is a tad bit tired." And to add evidence to his claim the silver eyed girl tried to stifle a yawn around her hand. Her father chuckled and rearranged her over his lap so that she was sitting across it.

"Miss Snape. Since you have been not been sorted into either Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Slytherin, or Ravenclaw – but Hogwarts itself – you have free choice on where to eat and sleep. Once you have chosen, however, you will not be able to change your decision for the rest of the term. Then, you may choose again the next term. You are unable, however, to participate in any Quidditch games. Professor McGonagall will hand you your timetable tomorrow and Cael will be given free reign of the castle as well as any new animal guides you may acquire." The Headmaster explained to the tired girl.

"Miss Snape, do you have any particular house in mind at the moment?" McGonagall asked with a small smile.

I...do you mind if I eat with Gryffindor? she quietly asked, looking up at her father. He looked down at her and shook his head. He knew that she was a little apprehensive because he was the head of Slytherin House, but whatever she wanted was fine with him.

"Whatever you want, little one." He said, kissing her on the forehead.

Papa? Can I... she hesitated. She looked at him with beseeching eyes, as if she was looking for something in his dark gaze.

"Yes? What is it, Hikosu?" he asked, prompting her to speak.

Can I sleep with you? she asked, blushing and looking down. It was quiet in the room, but when she dared look for a peek she didn't see

hate or disgust in his gaze. He was smiling warmly at her, nodding his head as he looked at the Headmaster.

"Albus? Can she share my quarters? For this term at least?" he asked. The two of them had been separated for twelve years, he didn't want to be separated from her for any given length of time ever again.

"I don't see why not. You are her father, after all, and it would be cruel to have the two of you separated after so long." The Headmaster said after a small length of silence. And with that the four of them – McGonagall said she had to create their timetables – went to Severus' personal chambers down in the dungeons.

The Headmaster used his wand to enlarge Severus' personal quarters to include another room entirely. There were a total of four rooms. A sitting room, for them to do all of their school-related works, Severus' bedroom, Hikosu's bedroom – that included two beds in case Cael wanted to sleep in his hybrid form, and a potions lab.

"Have a good night Severus, Miss Snape." And with that he was gone. Severus kept his hands on his daughter's shoulders, only leaving when she needed to change into her night clothes.

Goodnight, Papa. She whispered, giving him a peck on the cheek. Soon after they were both lying in bed. Cael was sleeping on the foot of Hikosu's bed, but none of the three magical beings could sleep. Finally, the silver eyed girl slipped from the bed and snuck into her father's room. She tiptoed as quietly as she could, but just when she reached her father's bed whisper of "Lumos." filled the air.

Light formed on the end of Severus' wand as he lifted the covers of his bed.

"Come here, little one." He softly said. Hikosu didn't need any more prodding and crawled into her father's bed. He whispered "Nox." And the light went out on the end of his wand. Hikosu snuggled up against her father's side. The Potions Master enjoyed watching his daughter fall into a deep sleep with a smile on his face. He draped an arm over her tiny waist and lent her his body heat...and for the first time in twelve years he slipped into a peaceful slumber.

Hey, guys! So sorry that it took me a long time to post this =( I was working on other things.

Anyway, thanks to:

DearPrudenceGirlHasGoneMad22 - Um...I'm not quite sure. I do know that it'll be a lot lighter than the dark stuff that was in there originally.

- Once again, thanks for pointing that out. =D

TwilightEclps - Aww, I know. I loved writing that.

TheBeginingsEnd - Me too! I live for fluff moments.

Raine44354 - Awww, it feels good to be missed and I know what you're talking about. Now you're making me want to see the movie lol

Crazy-obsessed-potter-chick - Of course I'll continue the story!

Lania Tesle - I'm glad you like my story. I've worked hard on it.

Dreamer - Of course I'd write back. I'm not heartless lol. Anyway, I had a dream like that, too, except for some reason the fifth house's common room was in a secret compartment in the owlry...for some reason...lol

And special thanks to my beta!

## Chapter Eight

### The Potion Master's Rare Smile

"There, look."

"Where?"

"Next to the tall kid with red hair."

"Wearing the glasses?"

"Is she really Snape's daughter?"

"Did you see his face?"

"Can you see her animal guide?"

"Did you see their scars?"

"Look at the color of her hair and eyes!"

Whispers followed both Harry and Hikosu the moment he left his dormitory and she left Severus' quarters the next day. Severus nearly had a serious heart attack due to worry when he woke to Hikosu trembling violently in his arms. He rose in a panic, trying to calm her down, and only calmed down himself when Cael handed him the vial full of water from the Animalia Life Spring.

When the wolf animal guide fully explained the situation to the Potions Master, he was furious. How dare the Dursleys ignore the letter that outlined his daughter's needs! If she had died then he would have murdered those pathetic muggles in cold blood, consequences be damned!

Severus smiled softly behind his hand when he remembered the paternal feeling that squeezed his chest when he calmly woke his trembling daughter and gently coaxed her into drinking the water from the Animalia Life Spring. He helped her as she blearily dressed into her new uniform and robes – now accented in the purist of whites and would never stain thanks to a healing/cleaning charm the Potions Master cast upon them.

People stared at little Hikosu as Professor Snape walked her to the Gryffindor table, sneering at the Gryffindors behind her back. It was only the beginning, however, of a unique and uncomfortable day. People were lining up outside their classrooms and standing on tiptoe to get a good look at them. They also doubled back to pass them in the hallways, staring and whispering. Harry wished they wouldn't, because he was trying to concentrate on finding his way to classes. At least he shared classes with Hikosu – if it weren't for her calming aura, the green eyed wizard didn't know if he could take the whispering.

There were a hundred and forty-two staircases at Hogwarts. Wide, sweeping ones, narrow, rickety ones, some that led somewhere

different on Fridays and some with a vanishing step halfway up that you had to remember to jump.

Then, after all that, there were doors that wouldn't open unless you asked politely, or tickled them in exactly the right place, and doors that weren't really doors at all, but solid walls just pretending. It was also very hard to remember where anything was, because it all seemed to move around a lot. The people in the portraits kept going to visit each other, and Harry was sure the coats of armor could walk despite the odd looks and giggles Hikosu kept sending him.

The ghosts didn't help, either. It was always a nasty shock when one of them glided suddenly through a door you were trying to open. Hikosu was a mess when one of them came near, trying to make peace. She would either hide behind Harry, or use Cael's animal form as a shield. Fortunately he was allowed in the classrooms – as long as he stayed out of the way – or else he would have thrown a fit. Nearly Headless Nick was always happy to point new Gryffindors in the right direction, but Peeves the Poltergeist was worth two locked doors and a trick staircase if you met him and were late for class. He would drop wastepaper baskets on your head, pull rugs from underneath your feet, pelt you with bits of chalk, or sneak up behind you, invisible, grab your nose, and screech, "Got Your Conk!" If Hikosu possessed a voice, she would be hoarse by the many times she had screamed. By the fourth time Peeves scored the silver eyed girl, she burst out in tears.

Both Harry and Cael comforted her best they could, Cael glaring at the offending poltergeist for upsetting his charge. When the animal guide was protective, he was really protective. He would morph into his humanoid form, ears pinned back and teeth bared as his eyes narrowed in suspicion. There was nothing he could do against a ghost, but that didn't mean that he couldn't be threatening when he wanted to be. The older girls throughout the castle were jealous of the little silver eyed Animalia.

Although Peeves was bad, even worse than him, if that was even possible, was the caretaker, Argus Filch. Harry and Ron managed to get on the wrong side of him on their very first morning...and he just hated Hikosu because of Cael. He was a 'filthy animal' according to him. Anyway, Filch found Harry and Ron trying to force their way through a door that unluckily turned out to be the entrance to the out-of-bounds corridor on the third floor. He wouldn't believe they

were lost, was sure they were trying to break into it on purpose, and was threatening to lock them in the dungeons when they were rescued by Professor Quirrell, who was passing.

Filch owned a cat called Mrs. Norris, a scrawny, dust-colored creature with bulging, lamplike eyes just like Filch's. She patrolled the corridors alone. Break a rule in front of her, put just one toe out of line, and she'd whisk off for Filch, who'd appear, wheezing, two seconds later. Filch knew the secret passageways of the school better than anyone (except perhaps the Weasley twins) and could pop up as suddenly as any of the ghosts. The students all hated him, and it was the dearest ambition of many to give Mrs. Norris a good kick.

And then, once you had managed to find them, there were the classes themselves. There was a lot more to magic, as Harry and Hikosu quickly found out, than waving your wand and saying a few funny words. Poor Hikosu found out during her first lesson that since she was unable to speak she would have to go to either the Headmaster, Professor McGonagall, or her father to study nonverbal magic. It was a lot harder than it seemed and tired the young one out immensely, but she trooped on.

They had to study the night skies through their telescopes every Wednesday at midnight and learn the names of different stars and the movements of the planets. Three times a week they went out to the greenhouses behind the castle to study Herbology, with a dumpy little witch called Professor Sprout, where they learned how to take care of all the strange plants and fungi, and found out what they were used for.

Easily the most boring class was History of Magic, which was the only one taught by a ghost. Professor Binns had been very old indeed when he had fallen asleep in front of the staff room fire and got up the next morning to teach, leaving his body behind him. Binns droned on and on while they scribbled down names and dates, and got Emeric the Evil and Uric the Oddball mixed up.

Professor Flitwick, the Charms teacher, was a tiny little wizard who had to stand on a pile of books to see over his desk. At the start of their first class he took the roll call, and when he reached Harry's name he gave an excited squeak and toppled out of sight. Once he



righted himself and got to Hikosu's name, he toppled out of sight again. It was quite humorous.

Professor McGonagall was again different. Harry had been quite right to think she wasn't a teacher to cross. Strict and clever, she gave them a talking-to the moment they sat down in her first class.

"Transfiguration is some of the most complex and dangerous magic you will learn at Hogwarts." She said. "Anyone messing around in my class will leave and not come back. You have been warned. Oh, and Miss Snape? Would you mind if your animal guide would be seated in the front by my desk so I can make sure he won't distract you during your studies?" at this Hikosu shook her head with a smile. Cael whined playfully, but sulked up towards the front.

Then she changed her desk into a pig and back again. They were all very impressed and couldn't wait to get started, but soon realized they weren't going to be changing the furniture into animals for a long time. After taking a lot of complicated notes, they were each given a match and started trying to turn it into a needle. By the end of the lesson, only Hermione Granger had made any difference to her match; Professor McGonagall showed the class how it had gone all silver and pointy and gave Hermione a rare smile.

The class everyone had really been looking forward to, except for Hikosu who favored Care of Magical Creatures, was Defense Against the Dark Arts, but Quirrell's lessons turned out to be a bit of a joke. His classroom smelled strongly of garlic, which everyone said was to ward off a vampire he'd met in Romania and was afraid would be coming back to get him one of these days. His turban, he told them, had been given to him by an African prince as a thank-you for getting rid of a troublesome zombie, but they weren't sure they believed this story. For one thing, when Seamus Finnigan asked eagerly to hear how Quirrell had fought off the zombie, Quirrell went pink and started talking about the weather; for another, they had noticed that a funny smell hung around the turban, and the Weasley twins insisted that it was stuffed full of garlic as well, so that Quirrell was protected wherever he went.

Harry was relieved that he and Hikosu weren't miles behind everyone else, though, in his opinion, Hikosu had it much harder than he did. He couldn't fathom having to learn the spells the

nonverbal way. He supposed it was just saying the spell in his head and then willing the magic to work, or something along those lines.

Anyway, lots of people had come from Muggle families and, like them, hadn't had any idea that they were witches and wizards. There was so much to learn that even people like Ron didn't have much of a head start.

Friday was an important day for Harry and Ron. They finally managed to find their way down to the Great Hall for breakfast without getting lost once.

"What have we got today?" Harry asked Ron as he poured sugar on his porridge.

"Double Potions with the Slytherins," said Ron. "Snape's Head of Slytherin House. They say he always favored them – we'll be able to see if it's true...but he seems a tad bit nicer lately. Maybe it's 'cause of Hikosu." He said. Harry shrugged but grinned when Hikosu was escorted to their table by the Potions Master himself.

Have a nice breakfast, Papa. She said to him, giving him a hug around the waist. Severus uncharacteristically smiled for everyone to see; he couldn't help but be happy around his daughter. He bent down and kissed her forehead, ignoring the strange looks he drew as he made his way to the high breakfast table.

"Morning, Hikosu." Harry said, giving her a side hug as she sat down. She smiled widely and nodded to the boys, scooting over so that the humanoid Cael could sit and eat.

"You know, I wish McGonagall favored us," said Harry. Professor McGonagall was head of Gryffindor House, but it hadn't stopped her from giving them a huge pile of homework the day before.

Just then, the mail arrived. Harry and Hikosu had gotten used to this by now, but it had given them a bit of a shock on the first morning, when about a hundred owls had suddenly streamed into the Great Hall during breakfast, circling the tables until they saw their owners, and dropping letters and packages onto their laps.

Hedwig hadn't brought Harry anything so far. She sometimes flew in to nibble his ear and have a bit of toast before going off to sleep in

the owlery with the other school owls. This morning, however, she fluttered down between the marmalade and the sugar bowl and dropped a note onto Harry's plate. Harry tore it open, with Hikosu looking over his shoulder, and read it. It said, in a very untidy scrawl:

Dear Harry an' Hikosu,

I know you get Friday afternoons off, so would you like to come and have a cup of tea with me around three? I want to hear all about your first week. Send us an answer back with Hedwig.

Hagrid.

Harry borrowed Ron's quill, scribbled yes, please, see you later on the back of the note, and sent Hedwig off again.

It was lucky that Harry had tea with Hagrid to look forward to, because the Potions lesson turned out to be the worst thing that had happened to him so far.

At the start-of-term banquet, Harry had gotten the idea that Professor Snape disliked him. By the end of the first Potions lesson, he knew he'd been wrong. Snape didn't dislike Harry – he hated him.

But...he had to go to a meeting after the class and before he went to Hagrid's hut...so maybe he didn't hate Harry as much as he let on.

Potions lessons took place down in one of the dungeons. It was colder here than up in the main castle, and would have been quite creepy enough without the pickled animals floating in glass jars all around the walls.

Snape, like Flitwick, started the class by taking the roll call, and like Flitwick, he paused at Harry's name. His eyes flickered to his daughter, who was sitting next to Harry, and smiled. He winked at her before he turned to the boy.

Don't worry about Papa, Harry. He doesn't mean anything. Just remember that he's teasing. Hikosu commented, but the green eyed boy wasn't too sure about that.

"Ah, yes," Professor Snape said softly, "Harry Potter. Our new - celebrity."

Draco Malfoy and his friends Crabbe and Goyle sniggered behind their hands. Snape finished calling the names and looked up at the class. His eyes were black like Hagrid's, but they had none of Hagrid's warmth. They were cold and empty and made you think of dark tunnels.

"You are here to learn the subtle science and exact art of potion-making," he began. He spoke in barely more than a whisper, but they caught every word – like Professor McGonagall, Snape had the gift of keeping a class silent without effort. "As there is little foolish wand-waving here, many of you will hardly believe this is magic. I don't expect you will really understand the beauty of the softly simmering cauldron with its shimmering fumes, the delicate power of liquids that creep through human veins, bewitching the mind, ensnaring the senses...I can teach you how to bottle fame, brew glory, even stopper death – if you aren't as big a bunch of dunderheads as I usually have to teach." He actually cracked a smile as he looked towards his daughter and the green eyed child next to her. By the awed look on her face he could tell that she would become a fairly decent potion brewer in her own right.

More silence followed his little speech. Harry and Ron exchanged looks with raised eyebrows. Hermione Granger was on the edge of her seat and looked desperate to start proving that she wasn't a dunderhead.

"Potter!" said Snape suddenly. "What would I get if I added powdered root of asphodel to an infusion of wormwood?"

Powdered root of what to an infusion of what? Harry panicked, somehow sending his thought to Hikosu. She looked over to him, shocked, and then smiled widely. Severus saw her smile and smirked to himself. It wasn't that he didn't like Harry, on the contrary – he was Lily's son – he just wanted to make sure that he would take care of his little girl.

Harry glanced at Ron, who looked as stumped as he was; Hermione's hand had shot into the air.

"I don't know, sir," said Harry.

Severus' lips curled into a smirk while his eyes twinkled. The first years looked at him with bewilderment since they had heard of his cruelty...but this man seemed like a playful bat or something.

"Tut, tut – fame clearly isn't everything." He said, and then he winked at Harry. Harry looked back with his mouth wide open. The school's harshest teacher winked at him – a Gryffindor!

Severus ignored Hermione's hand.

"Let's try again. Potter, where would you look if I told you to find me a bezoar?"

Hermione stretched her hand as high into the air as it would go without her leaving her seat, but Harry didn't have the faintest idea what a bezoar was. He tried not to look at Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle, who were shaking with laughter. Snape gave the trio a glare, which calmed them down, but gave his daughter a small smirk.

"I don't know, sir."

"Thought you wouldn't open a book before coming, eh, Potter? Or did you just not retain the information, no matter how much you read it?" Severus joked, making his daughter giggle. The charm on her wrist jingled and Harry caught the sparkle in her eye.

Harry...Papa's just playing with you. Don't sweat it. She commented, earning a mental snort from Cael as well. Poor guy had to sit next to Severus' desk, which was at the very front of the room...but he wasn't allowed to move or anything because of the potion ingredients.

Harry forced himself to keep looking straight into those cold eyes, except now he could detect the hint of a smile in their deep orbs. Harry had looked through the books at the Dursleys', but did Snape expect him to remember everything in One Thousand Magical Herbs and Fungi?

Severus was still ignoring Hermione's quivering hand.

"What is the difference, Potter, between monkshood and wolfsbane?"

At this, Hermione stood up, her hand stretching toward the dungeon ceiling.

"I don't know," said Harry quietly, smiling back at the professor. "I think Hermione does, though, why don't you try her?"

A few people laughed; Harry caught Seamus' eye, and Seamus winked. Snape, however, was not pleased. He wasn't angry at Harry, he was angry at the fact that the other students thought it was alright to laugh in his classroom.

"Sit down." He snapped at Hermione. "For your information, Potter, asphodel and wormwood make a sleeping potion so powerful it is known as the Draught of Living Death. A bezoar is a stone taken from the stomach of a goat and it will save you from most poisons. As for monkshood and wolfsbane, they are the same plant, which also goes by the name of aconite. Well? Why aren't you all copying that down?" he glare at the rest of the class. Hikosu had started writing it down as soon as her father started talking and she had told Harry to do the same. They, along with Hermione, were the only two who had written the notes before the rest of the class got their writing equipment out.

"Oh...and five points to Gryffindor...for being brave enough to stand up to a Professor who was being verbally abusive, Potter." The Potions Master quietly said as he passed the green eyed boy. Hikosu smiled up at her father as he passed. He, in return, gave her his rare smile – it was a smile only reserved for his daughter.

Things, however, didn't improve for the Gryffindors as the Potions lesson continued. It wasn't due to the fact that he 'hated' the ones outlined in red; it was due to the fact that they were frustrating him with their mistakes. Severus put them all into pairs and set them to mixing up a simple potion to cure boils. He swept around in his long black cloak, watching them weigh dried nettles and crush snake fangs, criticizing almost everyone except Malfoy, Harry, and Hikosu.

He was just telling everyone to look at the perfect way Malfoy had stewed his horned slugs when clouds of acid green smoke and a loud hissing filled the dungeon. Neville had somehow managed to melt Seamus' cauldron into a twisted blob, and their potion was seeping across the stone floor, burning holes in people's shoes. Within seconds, the whole class was standing on their stools while

Neville, who had been drenched in the potion when the cauldron collapsed, moaned in pain as angry red boils sprang up all over his arms and legs.

A sharp tug on Harry's sleeve brought his attention to the silent girl next to him. She was his partner and the two of them had, unfortunately, been seated next to Neville. Upon seeing that Hikosu's arm was starting to sprout ugly boils, he quickly gained the attention of the professor.

"Professor!" he exclaimed, gently holding up the silver eyed girl's injured arm. Severus was by them in a flash, as was Cael, and gently took hold of his daughter's injured arm.

"Idiot boy!" snarled Severus, clearing the spilled potion away with one wave of his wand. "I suppose you added the porcupine quills before taking the cauldron off the fire?"

Neville whimpered as boils started to pop up all over his nose.

"Take him to the hospital wing," Severus spat at Seamus. Then he rounded on Ron and Hermione, who had been on Neville's other side.

"You – Weasley, Granger – why didn't you tell him not to add the quills? Thought he'd make you look good if he got it wrong, did you?" this was so unfair that both of them opened their mouths to argue, but since they hadn't lost any house points they thought better of it.

Cael gently used some of his particular animal guide magic on his charge, dulling the pain and stopping the boils from spreading, as Severus collected their potions. As each group was finished, they were allowed to leave and, eventually, everyone save Ron, Hermione, Harry, and Hikosu were left.

"Potter, follow me. I want to have a word with you. Granger, Weasley, you are dismissed." And with that he led Harry, Hikosu, and Cael to his office in the next room. Cael led the silver eyed Animalia over to a comfortable wingback in the corner, gently rolling the sleeve to her uniform up so that he could work more of his magic.

"Be still, little one. It won't hurt a bit, I promise." He said, closing his eyes and concentrating. One hand hovered over the injured arm as both Harry and Severus stood behind the two. As the wolf male opened his eyes again, they seemed to glow in the dark room. His hand started to glow as well, reversing the effects of the potion that landed on Hikosu's arm. Soon, the arm looked as good as new.

Thanks, Cael. Love you. She said, giving her protector a kiss on the cheek. He nodded, suddenly shifting to his animal form.

Ah, yes, I may have forgotten to mention that healing takes a bit out of me, I'm afraid. And before you ask, Harry, I am tied to Lady Hikosu by our magic source, the Earthen Magic. Therefore, I am able to use my magic and transfer it to her in order to heal. When she gets older she will be able to do the same for me and for any other animal guide she may acquire. The wise animal guide said. Harry closed his mouth and his cheeks flushed a bit. Instead of replying to the animal guide's comment, the green eyed boy turned to face the Potions Master once again.

"You wished to speak with me, Professor?" he asked, nervously fiddling with the sleeve of his robe. Severus turned his attention from his daughter to that of the boy standing next to him.

"Ah, yes." He murmured, motioning for the boy to follow him out of the hearing distance of his daughter.

"I wanted to warn you, boy. My daughter holds you in high regards. I can see that the two of you have already formed a deep bond, but listen well. If you so harm a hair or her head or even make her think about crying...I will brew a potion so lethal that you'd wish you'd been hit by the most power Cruciatus Curse and slip it into your morning pumpkin juice. Don't think I won't, Potter." He warned, eyes like dark coals glimmering in the darkness of his study. He let the warning sink into Harry's brain before he gave the boy a ghost of a smile.

"But on much lighter terms...how would you feel about coming to live with me? Hikosu is my daughter and I will not have her living with those muggles you dare to call family any longer. The details are being worked out, but, if I'm right, the two of you can come live with me during the summer months when Hikosu turns thirteen, which is the turning point of an Animalia."



Harry's mouth dropped open again. He couldn't believe it. Severus Snape, the most feared professor at Hogwarts, was offering to give him a place to live.

"I must admit that my home isn't the brightest or the most inviting, but it has four walls and a roof. Plus...I live near your mother's old home." The older man trailed off as he remembered the small and comfortable home he knew as the Evans household.

"No! It...it seems great, Professor. I'd be happy to live with you and Hikosu...anything to get away from the Dursleys..." he muttered, earning a quiet chuckle from his professor.

As Harry, Hikosu, Cael's wolf form, Ron and Hermione – who had waited for them – climbed the steps out of the dungeon about ten minutes later, the green eyed boy's mind was racing. He was conflicted; he wanted to live with Hikosu, but could he even risk living with someone who seemed to hate him? Or did Severus just enjoy picking on him?

"Cheer up," said Ron, "Snape's always picking on Fred and George. Can I come and meet Hagrid with you?"

At five to three they left the castle and made their way across the grounds. Hagrid lived in a small wooden house on the edge of the forbidden forest. A crossbow and a pair of galoshes were outside the front door.

When Harry knocked they heard a frantic scrabbling from inside and several booming barks. Then Hagrid's voice rang out, saying, "Back, Fang, back."

Hagrid's big, hairy face appeared in the crack as he pulled the door open.

"Hang on," he said. "Back, Fang."

He let them in, struggling to keep a hold on the collar of an enormous black boarhound.

There was only one room inside. Hams and pheasants were hanging from the ceiling, a copper kettle was boiling on the open fire, and in the corner stood a massive bed with a patchwork quilt over it.

"Make yerselves at home," said Hagrid, letting go of Fang, who bounded straight at Ron and started licking his ears. Cael, still in his wolf form, settled down in front of the seat that Hikosu had chosen to sit at and she was busy laughing at Ron's misfortune. Like Hagrid, Fang was clearly not as fierce as he looked.

I'm just glad you don't do that to me, Cael. The silver eyed girl chuckled in her mind.

I could if you wanted, little one. And he grinned, well he grinned as much as he could in his wolf form. This earned another round of snickers from the female Animalia.

"This is Ron," Harry told Hagrid, who was pouring boiling water into a large teapot and putting rock cakes onto a plate.

"Another Weasley, eh?" said Hagrid, glancing at Ron's freckles. "I spent half me life chasin' yer twin brothers away from the forest."

The rock cakes were shapeless lumps with raisins that almost broke their teeth, but Harry and Ron pretended to be enjoying them as they told Hagrid all about their first lessons. Fang rested his head on Harry's knee and drooled all over his robes, much to Hikosu's amusement.

Harry and Ron were delighted to hear Hagrid call Filch "that old git."

"An' as fer that cat, Mrs. Norriss, I'd like ter introduce her to Fang sometime. D'yeh know, every time I go up ter the school, she follows me everywhere? Can't get rid of her – Filch puts her up to it." Hikosu wasn't too happy about that comment. She loved animals and had taken a liking to the Maine Coon.

Harry told Hagrid about Severus' lesson, and about the little talk they shared when Cael was fixing up Hikosu's arm. The other three males thought it was particularly funny, but the silver eyed girl blushed deeply throughout the story.

"How's yer brother Charlie?" Hagrid asked Ron. "I liked him a lot – great with animals."

Harry wondered if Hagrid had changed the subject on purpose. While Ron told Hagrid all about Charlie's work with dragons, Harry picked up a piece of paper that was lying under the tea cozy. It was a cutting from the Daily Prophet.

## GRINGOTTS BREAK-IN LATEST

Investigations continue into the break-in at Gringots on 31 July, widely believed to be the work of Dark wizards or witches unknown.

Gringotts goblins today insisted that nothing had been taken. The vault that was searched had in fact been emptied the same day.

"But we're not telling you what was in there, so keep your noses out if you know what's good for you," said a Gringotts spokesgoblin this afternoon.

Harry remembered Ron telling him on the train that someone had tried to rob Gringotts, but Ron hadn't mentioned the date.

"Hagrid!" said Harry, "that Gringotts break-in happened on my birthday! It might've been happening while we were there!" Hikosu gave a silent gasp, eyes widening as Cael rested his head on her lap in order to keep her calm.

There was no doubt about it, Hagrid definitely didn't meet Harry's eyes this time. He grunted and offered him another rock cake. Harry read the story again, letting the silver eyed girl read over his shoulder. The vault that was searched had in fact been emptied earlier that same day. Hagrid had emptied vault seven hundred and thirteen, if you could call it emptying, taking out that grubby little package. Had that been what the thieves were looking for?

As Harry and Ron walked back to the castle for dinner, their pockets weighed down with rock cakes they'd been too polite to refuse, Harry thought that none of the lessons he'd had so far had given him as much to think about as tea with Hagrid. Hikosu had said that she would meet up with them later, something about going to talk with Professor Snape about something. Harry went back to his thoughts. Had Hagrid collected that package just in time? where was it now? And did Hagrid know something about the package that he didn't want to tell them?

Here's the next chapter!

Thanks to:

TwilightEclps - Thanks for the review.

The readers son - Glad you like the story and thanks for your review!

Raine44354 - I know! I had to have him at least a little nicer to Harry since he's going to end up with Snape's daughter...or else she'd not like her father anymore...I like the idea of a nicer Snape anyway. =D

GinnyLover14 - Like I said to Raine, I wanted to make Snape a little nicer (not like fullblown personality change). I'm also slowly but surely changing Draco's personality...I'm thinking about making it a Harry/Hikosu/Draco triangle with Draco having unrequited love or something.

Ella-Riella - Aww, thanks!

TheBeginingsEnd - Thanks for the review!

## Chapter Nine

### The Midnight Duel

Harry had never believed he would meet a boy he hated more than Dudley, but that was before he met Draco Malfoy. Hikosu, and Cael by extension, thought differently. The silver eyed girl could see through the act – Draco Malfoy was an innocent boy who was hurt by the rejection Harry had shown him on their arrival at Hogwarts. He had been raised by muggle and half-blood haters, so how was he to know any better?

The female Animalia thought that next term she would sit at the Slytherin table and get to know the little blond haired 'annoyance' – as dubbed by her best friend.

Still, first-year Gryffindors only had Potions with the Slytherins, so Harry didn't have to put up with Draco that much. Or at least, they didn't until they spotted a notice pinned up in the Gryffindor common

room that made them all groan. Flying lessons would be starting on Thursday – and Gryffindor and Slytherin would be learning together.

There was at least one major problem. Hikosu was afraid of heights.

"Typical," said Harry darkly. "Just what I always wanted. To make a fool of myself on a broomstick in front of Malfoy." He said, lightly stroking Hikosu's hair as they sat in the library.

He had been looking forward to learning to fly more than anything else.

At least you're not afraid of heights, Harry. I don't want to learn...period. The silver eyed girl sighed as she stretched out in the emerald eyed boy's lap.

"You don't know that you'll make a fool of yourself," said Ron reasonably. "Anyway, I know Malfoy's always going on about how good he is at Quidditch, but I bet that's all talk."

Draco certainly did talk about flying a lot. He complained loudly about first years never getting on the house Quidditch teams and told long, boastful stories that always seemed to end with him narrowly escaping Muggles in helicopters. He wasn't the only one, though: the way Seamus Finnigan told it, he'd spent most of his childhood zooming around the countryside on his broomstick.

Cael had assured the silver eyed Animalia over and over again that it was perfectly normal not to like flying. Not everyone was cut out for it, but she could find flying fun when she rode some sort of magical animal.

Even Ron would tell anyone who'd listen about the time he'd almost hit a hang glider on Charlie's old broom. Everyone from wizarding families talked about Quidditch constantly. Ron had already had a big argument with Dean Thomas, who shared their dormitory, about soccer. Ron couldn't see what was exciting about a game with only one ball where no one was allowed to fly. Harry had caught Ron prodding Dean's poster of West Ham soccer team, trying to make the players move.

Severus had done his best to reassure his daughter that she would only have to fly for the lesson and then, if she was still feeling down,

he would teach her more about nonverbal magic. That had perked the young Animalia right up.

Neville had never been on a broomstick in his life, because his grandmother had never let him near one. Privately, Harry felt she'd had good reason, because Neville managed to have an extraordinary number of accidents even with both feet on the ground.

Hermione Granger was almost as nervous about flying as Neville was. This was something you couldn't learn by heart out of a book – not that she hadn't tried. At breakfast on Thursday she bored them all stupid with flying tips she'd gotten out of a library book called *Quidditch Through the Ages*. Hikosu had half a mind to tell Cael to bite her just to make her shut up, but, then again, she wasn't that cruel. Cael wouldn't have bitten her anyway.

Neville was hanging on to her every word, desperate for anything that might help him hang on to his broomstick later, but everyone else was pleased when Hermione's lecture was interrupted by the arrival of the mail.

Harry hadn't had a single letter since Hagrid's note, something that Malfoy had been quick to notice, of course. Malfoy's eagle owl was always bringing him packages of sweets from home, which he opened gloatingly at the Slytherin table.

A barn owl brought Neville a small package from his grandmother. He opened it excitedly and showed them a glass ball the size of a large marble, which seemed to be full of white smoke. Harry felt a small twinge of jealousy when Hikosu leaned over Neville's shoulder in curiosity. She had taken an interest in magical items ever since they had gone to Diagon Alley.

"It's a Remembrall!" he explained, a small blush dusting across his face. "Gran knows I forget things – this tells you if there's something you've forgotten to do. Look, you hold it tight like this and if it turns red – oh..." his face fell, because the Remembrall had suddenly glowed scarlet, "...you've forgotten something..."

The young Animalia let out a soundless giggle at the expression on Neville's face. Harry felt his stomach twinge again as his jealousy surfaced once again.

Neville was trying to remember what he'd forgotten when Draco Malfoy, who was passing the Gryffindor table, snatched the Remembrall out of his hand.

Harry and Ron jumped to their feet. They were half hoping for a reason to fight Malfoy, but Professor McGonagall, who could spot trouble quicker than any teacher in the school, was there in a flash.

"What's going on?"

"Malfoy's got my Remembrall, Professor."

Scowling, Malfoy quickly dropped the Remembrall back on the table.

"Just looking," he said, and he sloped away with Crabbe and Goyle behind him.

At three-thirty that after noon, Harry, Ron, Hikosu, Cael, and the other Gryffindors hurried down the front steps onto the grounds for their first fling lesson. It was a clear, breezy day, and the grass rippled under their feet as they marched down the sloping lawns toward a smooth, flat lawn on the opposite side of the grounds to the forbidden forest, whose trees were swaying darkly in the distance.

The Slytherins were already there, and so were twenty broomsticks lying in neat lines on the ground. Harry had heard Fred and George Weasley complain about the school booms, saying that some of them started to vibrate if you flew too high, or always flew slightly to the left.

Their teacher, Madam Hooch, arrived. She had short, gray hair, and yellow eyes like a hawk.

"Well, what are you all waiting for?" she barked. "Everyone stand by a broomstick. Come on, hurry up."

Harry glanced down at his broom. It was old and some of the twigs stuck out at odd angles. Hikosu stood next to him; her broomstick didn't fare much better. There were scratches and scuffs all along the surface of the handle of the broom.

"Stick out your right hand over your broom," called Madam Hooch at the front, "and say 'UP!'"



"UP!" everyone shouted.

Harry's broom jumped into his hand at once, but it was one of the few that did. Hermione Granger's had simply rolled over on the ground, and Neville's hadn't moved at all. Perhaps brooms, like horses, could tell when you were afraid, thought Harry, sending the thought to the girl beside him. Her broom had twitched, as if sensing her nervousness. Of course, she did have to use nonverbal magic, so it was harder for her. There was a quaver in Neville's voice that said only too clearly that he wanted to keep his feet on the ground.

Madam Hooch then showed them how to mount their brooms without sliding off the end, and walked up and down the rows correcting their grips. Harry and Ron were delighted when she told Draco he'd been doing it wrong for years, but Hikosu just shot them an exasperated glare.

"Now, when I blow my whistle, you kick off from the ground, hard." Said Madam Hooch. "Keep your brooms steady, rise a few feet, and then come straight back down by leaning forward slightly. On my whistle – three – two –"

But Neville, nervous and jumpy and frightened of being left on the ground, pushed off hard before the whistle had touched Madam Hooch's lips.

"Come back, boy!" she shouted, but Neville was rising straight up like a cork shot out of a bottle – twelve feet – twenty feet. Harry saw his scared white face look down at the ground falling away, saw him gasp, slip sideways off the broom and –

WHAM – a thud and a nasty crack and Neville lay face down on the grass in a heap. His broomstick was still rising higher and higher, and started to drift lazily toward the forbidden forest and out of sight.

Bloody Hell! Please tell me that Neville's alright...he's okay, right? Hikosu whispered, voice laced with horror. Her animal guide shook his head as he sat by her side.

I'm not sure, little one. Would you like me to accompany him to the Hospital Wing? I'll be able to tell you he's alright... he wouldn't admit it, but the strong and tough Cael was worried about the Gryffindor.

Hikosu nodded her head and the white wolf trotted to Madam Hooch's side. She was bending over Neville, her face as white as his.

"Broken wrist," Harry heard her mutter. "Come on, boy – it's all right, up you get."

She turned to the rest of the class.

"None of you is to move while I take this boy to the hospital wing! You leave those brooms where they are or you'll be out of Hogwarts before you can say 'Quidditch.' Come on, dear."

Neville, his face tear-streaked, clutching his wrist, hobbled off with Madam Hooch, who had her arm around him.

No sooner were they out of earshot than Malfoy burst into laughter. Hikosu gave him a disappointed look and, for a split second, she thought she saw him flinch, but it must have been a trick of the light. He was still laughing.

"Did you see his face, the great lump?"

The other Slytherins joined in.

"Shut up, Malfoy," snapped Parvati Patil. The Animalia would have said something if she could, but Cael had gone with Madam Hooch. She was forced to resort to placing her hand on Draco's shoulder and shaking her head.

"Ooh, sticking up for Longbottom?" said Pansy Parkinson, a hard-faced Slytherin girl. "Never thought you'd like fat little cry-babies, Parvati."

"Look!" said Draco, darting forward and snatching something out of the grass. "It's that stupid thing Longbottom's gran sent him."

The Remembrall glittered in the sun as he held it up.

"Give that here, Malfoy," said Harry and Hikosu tightened her grip on Draco's shoulder. He sent her a look; it was like he was crossed between two different emotions, but the worse one took a hold of him.

Draco smiled nastily.

"I think I'll leave it somewhere for Longbottom to find – how about – up a tree?"

"Give it here!" Harry yelled, but Draco had leapt onto his broomstick and taken off. Everyone gasped; he had grabbed Hikosu around the waist and pulled her onto the broomstick in front of him. She gave out a silent scream as they flew away; Draco hadn't been lying, he could fly well. Hovering level with the topmost branches of an oak he called,

"Come and get it, Potter!"

Harry grabbed his broom, royally pissed off.

"No!" shouted Hermione Granger. "Madam Hooch told us not to move – you'll get us all into trouble."

"Oh, and you want him to torment Hikosu even more?" Harry replied, ignoring her. Blood was pounding in his ears. He mounted the broom and kicked hard against the ground and up, up he soared; air rushed through his hair, and his robes whipped out behind him – and in a rush of fierce joy he realized he'd found something he could do without being taught – this was easy, this was wonderful. He pulled his broomstick up a little to take it even higher, and heard screams and gasps of girls back on the ground and an admiring whoop from Ron.

He turned his broomstick sharply to face Draco in midair. He looked stunned, but Hikosu looked terrified.

None of the first years saw the glint of yellow eyes shining from within the forbidden forest. She had travelled far and wide in search for her Animalia and finally...his bond had pulled her towards Hogwarts. She had finally found her. She watched, hidden in the shadows as his anger grew – how dare that boy lay his hands upon his Mistress!

"Give it here," Harry called, "or I'll knock you off that broom!"

"Oh, yeah?" said Draco, trying to sneer, but looking worried.

Harry knew, somehow, what to do. He leaned forward and grasped the broom tightly in his hands, and it shot forward towards Draco like a javelin. Draco only just got out of the way in time; Harry made a sharp about-face and held the broom steady. A few people below were clapping.

"No Crabbe and Goyle up here to save your neck, Malfoy," Harry called.

The same thought seemed to have struck Draco, but he glanced at the cowering form in front of him. Harry saw this, but didn't know what he was about to do.

"Catch it if you can, then!" he shouted, and he threw the glass ball high into the air and streaked back toward the ground.

Harry saw, and as though in slow motion, the ball rise up in the air and then start to fall. He leaned forward and pointed his broom handle down – next second he was gathering speed in a steep dive, racing the ball – wind whistled in his ears, mingled with the screams of people watching – he stretched out his hand – a foot from the ground he caught it, just in time to pull his broom straight, and he toppled gently onto the grass with the Remembrall clutched safely in his fist.

While the group was distracted, Hikosu had been jarred when Draco threw the Remembrall. Before the blond wizard could react she had slipped off the broom – it was easy enough since she was riding sidesaddle. Nobody heard her terrified scream, but Draco's shout was enough to bring the attention back towards the air. He looked on, horrified, but he quickly began a dive to catch her.

"Hikosu!" Harry shouted, stumbling forward. Nobody knew any advanced magic that was able to help her. Harry and Ron ran forward to try to catch her, but none of the three boys were going to make it.

Suddenly, a great roar was heard through the area. A black and white blur streaked forward, changing shape as it did, before a tall woman yanked the still falling Animalia out of the air. She landed on the ground in a crouch with the silver eyed girl cradled safely in her arms.

"Hush now, little one. You are safe with me." the woman purred. It wasn't only that that caught everyone's attention. The woman had long inky black hair with white streaks, golden eyes, very pale skin, and spotted markings on her face, neck, and wrists. She was wearing a simple tunic and pants with brown shoes.

The most noticeable oddity about her was that she had white ears – rounded ears like a big wild cat – with black spots. A large, long, somewhat bushy tail swished behind her. It was white with black spots as well.

She was an animal guide.

Who...are you? Hikosu asked, cocking her head to the side. She hoped that the woman – the animal guide – could understand her. The female animal guide simply stood and carried her over to a bench over to the side. Harry rushed towards them, but the woman glared at him, and at all of the other students.

She set Hikosu down on the bench and then phased into a white leopard – a snow leopard. She retained her golden eyes, but her body was beautiful, strong, and sleek.

I am called Feyen, My Lady. I am your servant, born to protect and serve you. I humbly request to become your animal guide. The snow leopard bowed her head, waiting for the silver eyed girl's response.

I...um...the girl responded, clearly shocked.

Please, My Lady. I have travelled far to serve you. Feyen pleaded, looking into the young girl's eyes. Hikosu sighed and smiled, placing her hand on the snow leopard's head.

I'm happy and humbled to call you my animal guide. Hikosu said. It was then that she realized that the rest of the class was watching them. Feyen snarled at them, but the silver eyed girl just placed a hand on her large head. Harry, wanting to get to his best friend's side, edged past the great cat. Feyen, noticing that Hikosu wasn't doing anything, let him.

"HARRY POTTER!"

Both Harry and Hikosu turned towards the voice. His heart sank faster than he'd just dived. Professor McGonagall was running toward them. he got to his feet, trembling.

"Never – in all my time at Hogwarts –"

Professor McGonagall was almost speechless with shock, and her glasses flashed furiously, "-how dare you – might have broken your neck –"

"It wasn't his fault, Professor – "

"Be quiet, Miss Patil –"

"But Malfoy –"

"That's enough, Mr. Weasley. Potter, follow me, now. Miss Snape...well, I'd better take you to your father after I take Potter to..." she trailed off, beckoning them forward. Fayen, who was larger than the normal snow leopard, crouched down so that her mistress could ride her.

Harry caught sight of Draco, Crabbe, and Goyle's triumphant faces as they left, following in Professor McGonagall's wake as she strode toward the castle. He was going to be expelled, he just knew it. At least Hikosu would be able to stay – Draco's the one at fault with her. Harry wanted to say something to defend himself and his best friend, but there seemed to be something wrong with his voice. Professor McGonagall was sweeping along without even looking at him; he had to jog to keep up. Now he'd done it. The snow leopard was pretty imposing, but at least Hikosu would be alright. Harry hadn't even lasted two weeks. He'd be packing his bags in ten minutes. What would the Dursleys say when he turned up on the doorstep? Better yet, would Snape still want him to live with him after Hikosu's second year?

Up the front steps, up the marble staircase inside, and still Professor McGonagall didn't say a word to them. She wrenched open doors and marched along corridors with Harry trotting miserably behind her, Hikosu and the snow leopard beside him. Maybe she was taking him to Dumbledore. He thought of Hagrid, expelled but allowed to stay on as gamekeeper. Perhaps he could be Hagrid's assistant. His stomach twisted as he imagined it, watching Ron and

the others becoming wizards while he stumped around the grounds carrying Hagrid's bag.

Professor McGonagall stopped outside a classroom. She opened the door and poked her head inside.

"Excuse me, Professor Flitwick, could I borrow Wood for a moment?"

Wood? Thought Harry, bewildered; was Wood a cane she was going to use on him?

But Wood turned out to be a person, a burly fifth-year boy who came out of Flitwick's class looking confused.

"Follow me, everyone." Said Professor McGonagall, and they marched on up the corridor, Wood looking curiously at Harry and Hikosu.

"In here."

Professor McGonagall pointed them into a classroom that was empty except for Peeves, who was busy writing rude words on the blackboard.

"Out, Peeves!" she barked, startling the silver eyed girl from her thoughts. Peeves threw the chalk into a bin, which clanged loudly, and he swooped out cursing. The snow leopard growled at the receding form, huffing when he finally disappeared. Professor McGonagall slammed the door behind him and turned to face the two boys.

"Potter, this is Oliver Wood. Wood – I've found you a Seeker." Wood's expression changed from puzzlement to delight.

"Are you serious, Professor?"

"Absolutely," said Professor McGonagall crisply. "The boy's a natural. I've never seen anything like it. Was that your first time on a broomstick, Potter?"

Harry nodded silently. He didn't have a clue what was going on, but he didn't seem to be being expelled, and some of the feeling started coming back to his legs.

What's a Seeker, Harry? The emerald eyed boy jumped when the feminine thought entered his mind. He turned to Hikosu, who had a look of curiosity on her pretty face, and shrugged. He didn't really know, either.

"He caught that thing in his hand after a fifty-foot dive," Professor McGonagall told Wood. "Didn't even scratch himself. Charlie Weasley couldn't have done it."

Wood was now looking as though all his dreams had come true at once.

"Ever seen a game of Quidditch, Potter?" he asked excitedly.

"Wood's captain of the Gryffindor team," Professor McGonagall explained.

"He's just the build for a Seeker, too," said Wood, now walking around Harry and staring at him. "Light – speedy – we'll have to get him a decent broom, Professor – a Nimbus Two Thousand or a Cleansweep Seven, I'd say."

"I shall speak to Professor Dumbledore and see if we can't bend the first-year rule. Heaven knows, we need a better team than last year. Flattened in that last match by Slytherin, I couldn't look Severus Snape in the face for weeks..."

Professor McGonagall peered sternly over her glasses at Harry.

"I want to hear you're training hard, Potter, or I may change my mind about punishing you."

Then she suddenly smiled.

"Your father would have been proud," she said. "He was an excellent Quidditch player himself."

Harry was silent as Professor McGonagall left him with Wood, leaving to lead Hikosu to Severus. The snow leopard was still



uneasy, but if her mistress trusted these people then she would trust them as well.

They are good people, Feyen. Professor McGonagall is one of my teachers. The silver eyed girl explained to the snow leopard animal guide, petting her head as they walked. Students stopped and stared at the two in awe, impressed at the fact that she now had two animal guides.

As you say, My Lady. I shall trust her if you say it is right. Feyen replied, a purr to her voice. The silver eyed girl merely smiled, excitement coursing through her veins as they made their way to Hikosu's quarters.

"You're joking"

It was dinnertime. Harry had just finished telling Ron what had happened when he'd left the grounds with Professor McGonagall. Ron had a piece of steak and kidney pie halfway to his mouth, but he'd forgotten all about it.

Hikosu had introduced her new animal guide to the others, but Cael wasn't present. She could tell that Feyen was excited about meeting him.

"Seeker?" he said. "But first years never – you must be the youngest house player in about..."

"A century," said Harry, shoveling pie into his mouth. He felt particularly hungry after the excitement of the afternoon. "Wood told me."

Ron was so amazed, so impressed, he just sat and gaped at Harry.

I'm so proud of you, Harry. Hikosu whispered into his mind as she patted his leg. Feyen was sitting behind her in her animal form, glaring at the Slytherins as they gaped at her sleek form.

"I start training next week," said Harry. "Only don't tell anyone, Wood wants to keep it a secret." He said, snaking his arm around his best friend's shoulders.

Fred and George Weasley now came into the hall, spotted Harry, and hurried over.

"Well done," said George in a low voice. "Wood told us. We're on the team too – Beaters."

"I tell you, we're going to win that Quidditch cup for sure this year," said Fred. "We haven't won since Charlie left, but this year's team is going to be brilliant. You must be good, Harry, Wood was almost skipping when he told us."

"Anyway, we've got to go, Lee Jordan reckons he's found a new secret passageway out of the school."

"Bet it's that one behind the statue of Gregory the Smarmy that we found in our first week. See you."

Fred and George had hardly disappeared when someone far less welcome turned up: Draco, flanked by Crabbe and Goyle. The strange thing was...he actually had some sort of strange emotion flash through his eyes. Was it a hint of...regret hiding in his eyes as he looked at Hikosu? Nobody but the silver eyed girl caught it, anyhow.

"Having a last meal, Potter? When are you getting the train back to the Muggles?"

"You're a lot braver now that you're back on the ground and you've got your little friends with you," said Harry coolly. There was of course nothing at all little about Crabbe and Goyle, but as the High Table was full of teachers, neither of them could do more than crack their knuckles and scowl.

"I'd take you on anytime on my own," said Malfoy. "Tonight, if you want. Wizard's duel. Wands only – no contact. What's the matter? Never heard of a wizard's duel before, I suppose?" after he said this, Hikosu grabbed Harry's hand and squeezed tightly. A bit of worry seeped through their mental bond and Harry couldn't help but squeeze back.

"Of course he has," said Ron, wheeling around. "I'm his second, who's yours?"

Draco looked at Crabbe and Goyle, sizing them up.

"Crabbe," he said. "Midnight all right? We'll meet you in the trophy room; that's always unlocked."

When Draco had gone, Ron and Harry looked at each other.

Harry...this sounds dangerous...and I'm not even attempting to sneak past Papa. So please, please, be careful! The silver eyed girl sent through their link. Harry smiled softly at her, their eyes briefly meeting before he turned back to Ron.

I'll be careful, Hikosu. I promise. He sent back.

I'll follow the boy, My Lady. I'll make sure he's safe. Feyen said to Hikosu, making sure that Harry didn't hear her.

"What is a wizard's duel?" said Harry. "And what do you mean, you're my second?"

"Well, a second's there to take over if you die," said Ron casually, getting started at last on his cold pie. Catching the look on Harry's face, he added quickly, "But people only die in proper duels, you know, with real wizards. The most you and Malfoy'll be able to do is send sparks at each other. Neither of you knows enough magic to do any real damage. I bet he expected you to refuse, anyway."

"And what if I wave my wand and nothing happens?"

"Throw it away and punch him on the nose," Ron suggested.

"Excuse me."

They both looked up. It was Hermione Granger.

"Can't a person eat in peace in this place?" said Ron.

Hermione ignored him and spoke to Harry.

"I couldn't help overhearing what you and Malfoy were saying..."

"Bet you could," Ron muttered.

"and you mustn't go wandering around the school at night, think of the points you'll lose Gryffindor if you're caught, and you're bound to be. It's really very selfish of you."

"And it's really none of your business," said Harry.

"Good-bye," said Ron.

Severus sensed Hikosu's uneasiness as she settled down into bed that night. He looked her over to make sure he hadn't missed anything earlier – he would never forgive himself if she had been hurting and he hadn't caught it.

"Is everything alright, little one?" he asked, eying the snow leopard that had suddenly gotten up and left. He gave the young girl a small smile as she nodded her head, reaching out her arms to give her father a hug before bed.

I'm fine, Papa. I'm just still a bit uneasy from the incident earlier today. She said, leaving Severus scowling. Draco Malfoy was going to have detention for a really long time after that stunt.

"Alright, my little one. If you're sure. I will see you in the morning, Hikosu. Sleep well." He said, giving her a kiss on the forehead before heading to his own room. The silver eyed girl couldn't help but sigh worriedly before drifting off to sleep.

Meanwhile, Harry wasn't faring the same. It wasn't what you'd call the perfect end to the day. Harry was awake, listening to Dean and Seamus falling asleep (Neville wasn't back from the hospital wing). Ron had spent all evening giving him advice such as "If he tries to curse you, you'd better dodge it, because I can't remember how to block them. There was a very good chance they were going to get caught by Filch or Mrs. Norris, and Harry felt he was pushing his luck, breaking another school rule today. On the other hand, Draco's sneering face kept looming up out of the darkness...and his actions towards Hikosu were frustrating him. This was his chance to beat Draco face-to-face. He couldn't miss this.

"Half-past eleven," Ron muttered at last, "we'd better go."

They pulled on their bathrobes, picked up their wands, and crept across the tower room, down the spiral staircase, and into the

Gryffindor common room. A few embers were still glowing in the fireplace, turning all the armchairs into hunched black shadows. They had almost reached the portrait hole when a voice spoke from the chair nearest them, "I can't believe you're going to do this, Harry.

A lamp flickered on. It was Hermione Granger, wearing a pink bathrobe and a frown.

"You!" said Ron furiously. "Go back to bed!"

"I almost told your brother," Hermione snapped, "Percy – he's a prefect, he'd put a stop to this."

Harry couldn't believe anyone could be so interfering.

"Come on," he said to Ron. He pushed open the portrait of the Fat Lady and climbed through the hole.

Hermione wasn't going to give up that easily. She followed Ron through the portrait hole, hissing at them like an angry goose.

"Don't you care about Gryffindor, do you only care about yourselves, I don't want Slytherin to win the house cup, and you'll lose all the points I got from Professor McGonagall for knowing about Switching Spells."

"Go away."

"All right, but I warned you, you just remember what I said when you're on the train home tomorrow, you're so..."

But what they were, they didn't find out. Hermione had turned to the portrait of the Fat Lady to get back inside and found herself facing an empty painting. The Fat Lady had gone on a nighttime visit and Hermione was locked out of the Gryffindor tower.

"Now what am I going to do?" she asked shrilly.

"That's your problem," said Ron. "We've got to go, we're going to be late."

They hadn't even reached the end of the corridor when Hermione caught up with them.

"I'm coming with you," she said.

"You are not."

"D'you think I'm going to stand out here and wait for Filch to catch me? if he finds all three of us I'll tell him the truth, that I was trying to stop you, and you can back me up."

"You've got some nerve..." said Ron loudly.

"Shut up, both of you!" said Harry sharply. "I heard something."

It was a sort of snuffling."

"Mrs. Norris?" breathed Ron, squinting through the dark.

It wasn't Mrs. Norris. It was Neville. He was curled up on the floor, fast asleep, but jerked suddenly awake as they crept nearer.

"Thank goodness you found me! I've been out here for hours, alone, since I told Cael to go back to Hikosu. I couldn't remember the new password to get in to bed."

"Keep our voice down, Neville. The password's 'Pig snout' but it won't help you now, the Fat Lady's gone off somewhere."

"How's your arm?" said Harry.

"Fine," said Neville, showing them. "Madam Pomfrey mended it in about a minute."

"Good...well, look, Neville, we've got to be somewhere, we'll see you later..."

"Don't leave me!" said Neville, scrambling to his feet, "I don't want to stay here alone, the Bloody Baron's been past twice already."

Ron looked at his watch and then glared furiously at Hermione and Neville.

"If either of you get us caught, I'll never rest until I've learned that Curse of the Bogies Quirrell told us about, and used it on you."

Hermione opened her mouth, perhaps to tell Ron exactly how to use the Curse of the Bogies, but Harry hissed at her to be quiet and beckoned them all forward.

They flitted along corridors striped with bars of moonlight from the high windows. At every turn Harry expected to run into Filch or Mrs. Norris, but they were lucky. They sped up a staircase to the third floor and tiptoed toward the trophy room.

Malfoy and Crabbe weren't there yet. The crystal trophy cases glimmered where the moonlight caught them. Cups, shields, plates, and statues winked silver and gold in the darkness. They edged along the walls, keeping their eyes on the doors at either end of the room. Harry took out his wand in case Malfoy leapt in and started at once. The minuets crept by.

"He's late, maybe he's chickened out," Ron whispered.

Then a noise in the next room made them jump. Harry had only just raised his wand when they heard someone speak...and it wasn't Draco.

"Sniff around, my sweet, they might be lurking in a corner."

It was Filch speaking to Mrs. Norris. Horror-struck, Harry waved madly at the other three to follow him as quickly as possible; they scurried silently toward the door, away from Filch's voice. Neville's robes had barely whipped around the corner when they heard Filch enter the trophy room.

"They're in here somewhere," they heard him mutter, "probably hiding." Harry was about to lead the others away when he heard another pair of footsteps, so much softer than Filch's, appear next to him.

"Harry, follow me." a womanly voice purred in his ear. The four students turned to see Fawcett in her humanoid form. Her face was half hidden by shadows, making her seem so much more dangerous.

"This way!" Harry mouthed to the others and, petrified, they began to creep down a long gallery full of suits of armor. They could hear Filch getting nearer. Neville suddenly let out a frightened squeak

and broke into a run – he tripped, grabbing Ron around the waist, and the pair of them toppled right into a suit of armor.

The clanging and crashing were enough to wake the whole castle.

"Run!" hissed Fayen, eyes narrowing at Neville. For a split second she was torn between whether she should stay and confront Filch or not, but then she decided to go with the children. She could always come up with an excuse for them.

The five of them sprinted down the gallery, not looking back to see whether Filch was following – they swung around the doorpost and galloped down one corridor then another, Harry in the lead (which wasn't the best idea Fayen had come up with, but she didn't exactly know the layout of the castle), without any idea where they were or where they were going – they ripped through a tapestry and found themselves in a hidden passageway, hurtled along it and came out near their Charms classroom, which they knew was miles from the trophy room.

"I think we've lost him," Harry panted, leaning against the cold wall and wiping his forehead. Neville was bent double, wheezing and spluttering. Fayen was keeping watch with wide eyes and open ears, determined to keep the children safe.

"I – told- you," Hermione gasped, clutching at the stitch in her chest, "I – told – you."

"We've got to get back t Gryffindor tower," said Ron, "quickly as possible."

"Malfoy tricked you," Hermione said to Harry. "You realize that, don't you? He was never going to meet you – Filch knew someone was going to be in the trophy room, Malfoy must have tipped him off."

Harry thought she was probably right, but he wasn't going to tell her that.

"Let's go." Fayen said.

It wasn't going to be that simple. They hadn't gone more than a dozen paces when a doorknob rattled and something came shooting out of a classroom in front of them.



It was Peeves. He caught sight of them and gave a squeal of delight.

"Shut up, Peeves – please – you'll get us thrown out."

Peeves cackled, much to the displeasure of Fayen, who pinned her ears flat.

"Wandering around at midnight, Ickle Firsties? Tut, tut, tut. Naughty, naughty, you'll get caught."

"Not if you don't give us away, Peeves, please."

"Should tell Filch, I should," said Peeves in a saintly voice, but his eyes glittered wickedly. "It's for your own good, you know."

"Not if I take care of you, first. Animal guides have the power to dispel spirits, Peeves, if need be." Fayen said. None of them knew if she was fibbing, but soon enough Ron became agitated.

"Get out of the way," snapped Ron, taking a swipe at Peeves – this was a big mistake.

"STUDENTS OUT OF BED!" Peeves bellowed, "STUDENTS OUT OF BED DOWN THE CHARMS CORRIDOR!"

Ducking under Peeves, they ran for their lives, right to the end of the corridor where they slammed into a door – and it was locked. Fayen pounded on it with her dangerously sharp fingernails, but it had no effect.

"This is it!" Ron moaned, as they pushed helplessly at the door, "We're done for! This is the end!"

They could hear footsteps, Filch running as fast as he could toward Peeves' shouts.

"Oh, move over," Hermione snarled. She grabbed Harry's wand, tapped the lock, and whispered, "Alohomora!"

The lock clicked and the door swung open – they piled through it, shut it quickly, and pressed their ears against it, listening. They gave

Fayen the most space because she had the best hearing out of all of them.

"Which way did they go, Peeves?" Filch was saying. "Quick, tell me."

"Say 'please.'"

"Don't mess with me, Peeves, now where did they go?"

"Shan't say nothing if you don't say please," said Peeves in his annoying singsong voice.

"All right – please."

"NOTHING! Ha haaa! Told you I wouldn't say nothing if you didn't say please! Ha ha! Haaaaaa!" and they heard the sound of Peeves whooshing away and Filch cursing in rage.

"He thinks this door is locked," Harry whispered. "I think we'll be okay – get off, Neville!" For Neville had been tugging on the sleeve of Harry's bathrobe for the last minute. "What?" He only noticed now that Fayen had shifted into her snow leopard form and was hissing at the form behind them.

Harry turned around – and saw, quite clearly, what. For a moment, he was sure he'd walked into a nightmare – this was too much, on top of everything that had happened so far.

They weren't in a room, as he had supposed. They were in a corridor. The forbidden corridor on the third floor. And now they knew why it was forbidden.

They were looking straight into the eyes of a monstrous dog, a dog that filled the whole space between ceiling and floor. It had three heads. Three pairs of rolling, mad eyes; three noses, twitching and quivering in their direction; three drooling mouths, saliva hanging in slippery ropes from yellowish fangs.

Fayen stepped in front of the four students, intent on protecting them from the large beast. It was standing quite still, all six of its eyes staring at them, and Harry knew that the only reason they weren't already dead was that their sudden appearance had taken it by

surprise and that it could sense the power that Feyen was emitting. It was going to quickly get over its surprise; there was no mistaking the thunderous growls that it was emitting.

Harry groped for the doorknob – between Filch and death, he'd take filch. They fell back ward – Harry slammed the door shut after he made sure the snow leopard had followed, and they ran, they almost flew back down the corridor. Filch must have hurried off to look for them somewhere else, because they didn't see him anywhere, but they hardly cared – all they wanted to do was put as much space as possible between them and that monster. They didn't stop running until they reached the portrait of the Fat Lady on the seventh floor.

"Where on earth have you all been?" she asked, looking at their bathrobes hanging off their shoulder and their flushed and sweaty faces. She looked equally surprised to see an animal guide standing before her.

"Never mind that – pig snout, pig snout," panted Harry and the portrait swung forward. They scrambled into the common room and collapsed, trembling, into armchairs.

It was a while before any of them said anything. Neville, indeed, looked as if he'd never speak again.

"What do you think they're doing, keeping a thing like that locked up in a school?" said Ron finally. "If any dog needs exercise, that one does."

Hermione had got both her breath and her bad temper back again.

"You don't use your eyes, any of you, do you?" she snapped, angering the snow leopard. She shifted back to her humanoid form, glaring at the human girl.

"Didn't you see what it was standing on?" Hermione continued, ignoring Feyen.

"The floor?" Harry suggested. "I wasn't looking at its feet, I was too busy with its heads."

"No, not the floor. It was standing on a trapdoor. It's obviously guarding something."

She stood up, glaring at them.

"I hope you're pleased with yourselves. We could all have been killed – or worse, expelled. Now, if you don't mind, I'm going to bed."

Ron stared after her, his mouth open.

"No, we don't mind," he said. "You'd think we dragged her along, wouldn't you?"

But Hermione had given Harry something else to think about as he climbed back into bed. Fayen had curled herself up on an extra blanket beside the bed, facing the door. The dog was guarding something...What had Hagrid said? Gringotts was the safest place in the world for something you wanted to hide – except perhaps Hogwarts.

It looked as though Harry had found out where the grubby little package from vault seven hundred and thirteen was...

I am so sorry that this chapter is so late. I was going to post like two weeks ago, but then things happened. School definately picked up (I had like 3 papers and tests in a week) and then my sister's cat had to be put to sleep. He was in my family for 12 years, since I was eight. He had inoperable cancer. His name was Roswell. (Like the city in New Mexico).

Anyway, thanks to:

Elia950 - Well, what I can do is have a Harry/Hikosu with one sided Draco/Hikosu (with Draco being the one sided) and then have his obsessive/romantic feelings dull down into a brotherly mode, like Cael.

Beautiful-Phoenix75 - Love that you like my story! Thanks for the review.

The Submarauder - Like I said before, I should do that for when he gets them in the 3rd book. XD

Oh! One more message! I'm going to give Hikosu at least two more animal guides. I'm asking you guys as my readers to pick an animal, name, and their looks as a human to put in my story. In the fifth book one of the four animal guides is going to die, however. I'm so evil, I know...but it makes for good drama...unless you guys vote for a near fatal wound or something. (I'm going to put up a poll later on).

## Chapter Ten

### Halloween

Draco couldn't believe his eyes when he saw that Harry and Ron were still at Hogwarts the next day, looking tired but perfectly cheerful. Indeed, by the next morning Harry and Ron thought that meeting the three-headed dog had been an excellent adventure, and they were quite keen to have another one.

The young blond boy was rather jealous – although he didn't know why – when Hikosu had hurried into the room and that snow leopard had ambled up to her, purring. It wasn't this that had him jealous, however; it was when she spotted Harry and instantly flung her arms around his neck and gave him a kiss on the cheek. The two were

rather close as he saw...but Draco didn't think that Harry should be friends with such pretty and mysterious creatures.

At the Gryffindor table, Cael had finally met Feyen. The two of them sat in the animal forms, staring at each other before they began to talk.

Who are you? Cael warily asked as the gorgeous snow leopard narrowed her eyes at him. Both of them felt a bond forming between them, but neither of them recognized what it meant...yet.

I am Feyen. You? She replied, cocking her head to the side. Her beautiful eyes narrowed as she sized the great white wolf up – at least she could admit that his coat was well kept.

I am Cael, loyal servant to Lady Hikosu. At this the snow leopard's whole demeanor changed. The air around her changed from suspicious to warm and welcoming.

Ah! You are Lady Hikosu's first animal guide! It is a great honor to meet you, sir. I am her second. We bonded yesterday. After she gave this information, Cael's eyes warmed up. They knew the other was telling the truth for animal guides couldn't lie to their brethren. Those under the same Animalia became each others' family.

It is my pleasure, Feyen. Believe me; Lady Hikosu is happy to have you as well. I can feel it. The great wolf said, eyes smiling as he nodded his head to her. Both of them phased at the same time, taking a seat next to the other on the bench in order to eat breakfast.

Harry was filling Ron in about the package that seemed to have moved from Gringotts to Hogwarts, and they spent a lot of time wondering what could possibly need such heavy protection. One of his hands was clasped tightly in Hikosu's; she had refused to release him after she saw that he was alright.

"It's either really valuable or really dangerous," said Ron.

"Or both," said Harry.

Or perhaps it's only dangerous in the hands of those who want to use it for evil? Hikosu suggested and Cael relayed to Ron quietly.

But as all they knew for sure about the mysterious object was that it was about two inches long, they didn't have much chance of guessing what it was without further clues.

Neither Neville nor Hermione showed the slightest interest in what lay underneath the dog and the trapdoor. All Neville cared about was never going near the dog again.

Hermione was now refusing to speak to Harry and Ron, but she was such a bossy know-it-all that they saw this as an added bonus. All they really wanted now was a way of getting back at Draco, and to their great delight, just such a thing arrived in the mail about a week later.

As the owls flooded into the Great Hall as usual, everyone's attention was caught at once by a long, thin package carried by six large screech owls. Harry was just as interested as everyone else to see what was in this large parcel, and was amazed when the owls soared down and dropped it right in front of him, knocking his bacon to the floor. They had hardly fluttered out of the way when another owl dropped a letter on top of the parcel.

Harry ripped open the letter first, which was lucky, because it said:

**DO NOT OPEN THE PARCEL AT THE TABLE.**

It contains your new Nimbus Two Thousand, but I don't want everybody knowing you've got a broomstick or they'll all want one. Oliver Wood will meet you tonight on the Quidditch field at seven o'clock for your first training session.

Professor M. McGonagall

Hikosu could feel Harry's elation through their weak bond; it was strange how it seemed to grow just the tiniest bit strong as their time at Hogwarts passed. Harry had difficulty hiding his glee as he handed the note to Ron to read.

"A Nimbus Two Thousand!" Ron moaned enviously. "I've never even touched one."

The three of them, along with Cael and Feyen, left the hall quickly, wanting to unwrap the broomstick in private before their first class, but halfway across the entrance hall they found the way upstairs

barred by Crabbe and Goyle. Fayen growled menacingly as Cael gave them a disapproving glare. Hikosu just gave a disappointed and unheard sigh, leaving Draco feeling a jolt of some unnamed emotion. He shrugged it off, seizing the package from Harry and feeling it.

"That's a broomstick," he said, throwing it back to Harry with a mixture of jealousy and spite on his face. "You'll be in for it this time, Potter, first years aren't allowed them."

Ron couldn't resist it.

"It's not any old broomstick," he said, "it's a Nimbus Two Thousand. What did you say you've got at home, Malfoy, a Comet Two Sixty?" Ron grinned at Harry. "Comets look flashy, but they're not in the same league as Nimbus."

Finally Cael took the situation into his own hands. He phased into his humanoid look, giving the three Slytherins a dangerous look.

"Boys, I believe you should be getting to class. Don't make me do something I'd rather not do." He said, grinning and showing off his fangs. Fayen smirked in her snow leopard form, showing off her impressive set of teeth as well. Although they were impressive, all Draco did was glare, keeping his fear hidden.

"What would you know about it, Weasley, you couldn't afford half the handle," Draco snapped back. "I suppose you and your brothers have to save up twig by twig."

Before Ron could answer, Professor Flitwick appeared at Malfoy's elbow.

"Not arguing, I hope, boys?" he squeaked.

"Potter's been sent a broomstick, Professor," said Draco quickly.

"Yes, yes, that's right," said Professor Flitwick, beaming at Harry. "Professor McGonagall told me all about the special circumstances, Potter. And what model is it?"



"A Nimbus Two Thousand, sir," said Harry, fighting not to laugh at the look of horror on Draco's face. "And it's really thanks to Malfoy here that I've got it," he added.

Harry, Hikosu, Ron and the others headed upstairs, smothering their laughter at Malfoy's obvious rage and confusion.

Harry, that's mean. Hikosu giggled as they continued up the stairs.

"Well, it's true," Harry chortled as they reached the top of the marble staircase, "If he hadn't stolen Neville's Remembrall I wouldn't be on the team..."

"Well, if he hadn't stolen that ball then I wouldn't have found Lady Hikosu." Purred Fayen as she phased into her humanoid form. Harry's hand tightened around his best friend's hand, face flushing as he realized he hadn't let go of it the entire time. They were obviously remembering when she had fallen.

"That was scary. If Fayen hadn't caught her..." Ron said, shuddering. They all did. If Fayen hadn't caught her than Hikosu would have been dead.

"So I suppose you think that's a reward for breaking rules?" came an angry voice from just behind them. Hermione was stomping up the stairs, looking disapprovingly at the package in Harry's free hand.

"I thought you weren't speaking to us?" said Harry.

"Yes, don't stop now," said Ron, "it's doing us so much good."

Hermione marched away with her nose in the air.

Harry had a lot of trouble keeping his mind on his lessons that day. It kept wandering up to the dormitory where his new broomstick was lying under his bed, or straying off to the Quidditch field where he'd be learning to play that night. He bolted his dinner that evening without noticing what he was eating, and then rushed upstairs with Ron to unwrap the Nimbus Two Thousand at last. He had agreed to meet Hikosu in the Quidditch pitch; Wood didn't mind that they'd be having a spectator. He had been fascinated with a certain snow leopard. He was saying that it was too bad she wasn't a lion – she could have been their mascot.

Oliver Wood was one of the few people who accepted the new arrival other than the first years who saw Fayen save little Hikosu's life. Not much was known about the Animalia and their animal guides since their numbers had been dwindling – not to mention that they lost their trust in most of humanity – so the witches and wizards of Hogwarts didn't trust what they didn't understand.

"Wow," Ron sighed, as the broomstick rolled onto Harry's bedspread.

Even Harry, who knew nothing about the different brooms, thought it looked wonderful. Sleek and shiny, with a mahogany handle, it had a long tail of neat, straight twigs and Nimbus Two Thousand written in gold near the top.

As seven o'clock drew nearer, Harry left the castle and set off in the dusk toward the Quidditch field. He'd never been inside the stadium before. Hundreds of seats were raised in stands around the field so that the spectators were high enough to see what was going on. At either end of the field were three golden poles with hoops on the end. They reminded Harry of the little plastic sticks Muggle children blew bubbles through, except that they were fifty feet high.

But what got Harry's attention, however, was the fact that there was someone already in the field. Hikosu, Cael, and Fayen were already there...except for the fact that Cael and Fayen seemed to be playing some sort of keep away game. They had stolen Hikosu's outer robes, the ones outlined in white, and were throwing it back and forth to each other as the silver eyed girl jumped to reach for it. All three of them were laughing...looking almost like a family.

Not wanting to bother them and too eager to fly again to wait for Wood, he sent a small nudge through his and Hikosu's still raw bond. She nudged him back and he smiled, mounting his broomstick and kicking off the ground. What a feeling – he swooped in and out of the goal posts and then sped up and down the field. The Nimbus Two Thousand turned wherever he wanted at his lightest touch.

Harry... he heard a whisper in his mind just before a voice shouted, "Hey, Potter, come down!"

Oliver Wood had arrived. He was carrying a large wooden crate under his arm. Harry landed next to him.

"Very nice," said Wood, his eyes glinting. "I see what McGonagall meant...you really are a natural. I'm just going to teach you and your lady friend the rules this evening, then you'll be joining team practice three times a week." The older boy explained, sending a sidelong glance at Feyen while he was talking. Hikosu's face flushed bright red at being referred to as Harry's 'lady friend'.

He opened the crate while Hikosu and her two animal guides appeared next to the emerald eyed boy. Inside the crate were four different-sized balls.

"Right," said Wood. "Now, Quidditch is easy enough to understand, even if it's not too easy to play. There are seven players on each side. Three of them are called Chasers."

"Three Chasers." Harry, Cael, and Feyen replied. Hikosu just gave a small smile and a slight nod to show that she understood. Wood then took out a bright red ball about the size of a soccer ball.

"This ball's called the Quaffle," said Wood. "The Chasers throw the Quaffle to each other and try and get it through one of the hoops to score a goal. Ten points every time the Quaffle goes through one of the hoops. Follow me?"

"The Chasers throw the Quaffle and put it through the hoops to score," Harry recited. "So – that's sort of like basketball on broomsticks with six hoops, isn't it?"

Or sort of like hockey in the air with an added player. Hikosu mused, earning a snort from her best friend.

"What's basketball?" said Wood curiously.

"Never mind," said Harry quickly.

Aww...Wood lives a sheltered life. The silver eyed girl sighed, once again drawing soft laughter from her best friend.

"Now, there's another player on each side who's called the Keeper – I'm Keeper for Gryffindor. I have to fly around our hoops and stop the other team from scoring."

"Three Chasers, One Keeper." Cael said this time. They were determined to remember it all for it was a unique sport.

"And they play with the Quaffle. Okay, got that. So what are they for?" Harry asked, pointing at the three balls left inside the box.

"I'll show you now," said Wood. "Take this."

He handed Harry a small club, a bit like a short baseball bat.

"I'm going to show you what the Bludgers do," Wood said. "These two are the Bludgers."

He showed them two identical balls, jet black and slightly smaller than the red Quaffle. The wolf figure seemed to notice that they were straining to escape the straps holding them inside the box. He motioned for Harry to hand him the bat, grinning as the young boy did so.

"Stand back," Wood warned Harry and Hikosu, thinking that the two animal guides could look after themselves. The older teen bent down and freed one of the Bludgers.

At once, the black ball raised high in the air and then pelted straight at the two females. Harry quickly wrapped his arms around Hikosu's waist and jerked her out of the way while Cael swung the bat at the Bludger to keep it from breaking Fayen's nose. She was shocked at how fast the little black ball could move. It zoomed around their heads and then shot at Wood, who dived on top of it and managed to pin it to the ground.

"See?" Wood panted, forcing the struggling Bludger back into the crate and strapping it down safely. "The Bludgers rocket around, trying to knock players off their brooms. That's why you have two Beaters on each team – the Weasley twins are ours – it's their job to protect their side from the Bludgers and try and knock them toward the other team. So – think you've got all that?"

"Three Chasers try and score with the Quaffle; the Keeper guards the goal posts; the Beaters keep the Bludgers away from their team," Fayen responded this time.

"Very good, you four." Said Wood.

"Er...have the Bludgers ever killed anyone?" Harry asked, hoping he sounded offhand.

"Never at Hogwarts. We've had a couple of broken jaws but nothing worse than that. Now, the last member of the team is the Seeker. That's you. And you don't have to worry about the Quaffle or the Bludgers..."

"Unless they crack his head open." Fayen purred sadistically. The others looked at her with weird expressions before going back to Wood's explanation.

"Don't worry, the Weasleys are more than a match for the Bludgers – I mean, they're like a pair of human Bludgers themselves."

Wood reached into the crate and took out the fourth and last ball. Compared with the Quaffle and the Bludgers, it was tiny, about the size of a large walnut. It was bright gold and had little fluttering silver wings.

"This," said Wood, "is the Golden Snitch, and it's the most important ball of the lot. It's very hard to catch because it's so fast and difficult to see. It's the Seeker's job to catch it. You've got to weave in and out of the Chasers, Beaters, Bludgers, and Quaffle to get it before the other team's Seeker, because whichever Seeker catches the Snitch wins his team an extra hundred and fifty points, so they nearly always win. That's why Seekers get fouled so much. A game of Quidditch only ends when the Snitch is caught, so it can go on for ages – I think the record is three months, they had to keep bringing on substitutes so the players could get some sleep." He paused for breath, "Well, that's it...any questions?"

Harry shook his head, looking down at his best friend. Her eyes were wide with worry for him. He understood what he had to do all right, it was doing it was that going to be the problem.

"We won't practice with the Snitch yet," said Wood, carefully shutting it back inside the crate, "it's too dark, we might lose it. Let's try you out with a few of these." He said and the three spectators took their cue. They quickly settled in the stands as Wood pulled a bag of ordinary golf balls out of his pocket and a few minutes later, he and

Harry were up in the air, Wood throwing the golf balls as hard as he could in every direction for Harry to catch.

Harry didn't miss a single one, earning cheers and praises from the three spectators. The ones who got him the most were the soft and gentle praises that only he could hear. The ones from Hikosu. Wood was delighted. After half an hour, night had really fallen and they couldn't carry on.

"That Quidditch cup'll have our name on it this year," said Wood happily as they trudged back up to the castle. "I wouldn't be surprised if you turned out better than Charlie Weasley, and he could have played for England if he hadn't gone off chasing dragons." At the mention of dragons little Hikosu's eyes brightened so much.

I'd like a dragon... she sighed dreamily, much to the amusement of Harry, Cael, and Feyen.

Perhaps it was because he was so busy, what with Quidditch practice three evenings a week on top of all his homework, but Harry could hardly believe it when he realized that he'd already been at Hogwarts two months. The castle felt more like home than Privet Drive ever had. His lessons, too, were becoming more and more interesting now that they had mastered the basics.

Of course, Harry was experiencing the worst bout of separation anxiety that he had ever faced. During these two months at Hogwarts he slept in totally different ends of the castle from Hikosu. He had never slept so far away from Hikosu before. It pulled on his very heart and caused him to start breaking down whenever he had gone without holding her hand or being in her presence. He would become a nervous wreck.

Usually, Hikosu was the same. They all had the same classes together, but when they were forced to study in separate rooms – Hikosu in the dungeon with Severus and Harry in the tower with the other Gryffindors – they were forced to resort to that one magical sheet of paper they both had, remember? One of them would write on their sheet and the message would send to the other sheet and vice versa.

Of course, the two of them spent quite a bit of time in the Great Hall and the Library so they could study together.

On Halloween morning they woke to the delicious smell of baking pumpkin wafting through the corridors. Even better, Professor Flitwick announced in Charms that he thought they were ready to start making objects fly, something they had all been dying to try since they'd seen him make Neville's toad zoom around the classroom. Professor Flitwick put the class into pairs to practice.

Harry's partner was Seamus Finnigan (which was a relief, because Neville had been trying to catch his eye). Ron, however, was to be working with Hermione Granger. It was hard to tell whether Ron or Hermione was angrier about this. She hadn't spoken to either of them since the day Harry's broomstick had arrived. Hikosu was to work with another one of Harry's new friends, Dean Thomas. Cael and Feyen sat at the head of the classroom in their animal forms, looking at the students intently.

"Now, don't forget that nice wrist movement we've been practicing!" squeaked Professor Flitwick, perched on top of his pile of books as usual. "Swish and flick, remember, swish and flick. And saying the magic words properly is very important, too – never forget Wizard Baruffio, who said 's' instead of 'f' and found himself on the floor with a buffalo on his chest."

It was very difficult. Harry and Seamus swished and flicked, but the feather they were supposed to be sending skyward just lay on the desktop. Seamus got so impatient that he prodded it with his wand and set fire to it – Harry had to put it out with his hat.

Ron, at the next table, wasn't having much more luck.

"Wingardium Leviosa!" he shouted, waving his long arms like a windmill.

"You're saying it wrong," Harry heard Hermione snap. "It's Wing-gar-dium Levi-o-sa, make the 'gar' nice and long."

"You do it, then, if you're so clever," Ron snarled.

Hermione rolled up the sleeves of her gown, flicked her wand, and said, "Wingardium Leviosa!"

Their feather rose off the desk and hovered about four feet above their heads.

"Oh, well done!" cried Professor Flitwick, clapping. "Everyone see here, Miss Granger's done it!"

Ron was in a very bad mood by the end of the class. He wasn't the only one who had trouble with the spell at first. Hikosu was doing all that she could; she was mouthing the words and making the correct wrist movement and neither Feyen or Cael could figure out what was going wrong.

My lady, perhaps you should not only mouth the words...but say them in your head as well? Feyen suggested as she stared intently at her mistress. Cael cocked his head to the side as if he was thinking about her suggestion.

It may prove useful, little one. I often find that repeating words in my head both strengthens the meaning and helps me remember. Perhaps it will help strengthen your magic? The wolf commented as he thought about it. Nonverbal magic was very difficult to master. She tried again, this time thinking the words instead of just simply mouthing them, and the feather glowed a soft white, lifting just barely off the table. It was a weak Wingardium Leviosa spell, but she had accomplished it.

On the way out of the room Hermione asked to walk with her, commenting that she thought that they would benefit from studying together. After all, they were the only two who had successfully completed the spell. On their walk, however, they overheard a rather nasty comment.

"It's no wonder no one can stand her," Ron said to Harry as the four of them pushed their way into the crowded corridor, "she's a nightmare, honestly."

Hikosu gasped soundlessly as Hermione knocked into Harry as she hurried past them. Harry caught a glimpse of her face – and was startled to see that she was in tears. The silver eyed girl glared at Ron for upsetting Hermione, telling her two animal guides to stay put.



I'm going after her. Both of you stay here and make sure they don't do anything stupid. Hikosu said directly to the two animal guides. Fayen made a motion as if she were going to protest, but the chilling look in the eleven year old girl's eyes made her think twice.

I'm going alone, Fayen. She said, but then her eyes softened, but I'll call you later if I need help. That was enough to calm the female snow leopard down.

Wait, why her? Cael cried, pretending to be insulted.

...Would you really want to go into a female's bathroom? Fayen asked, sending the higher ranked animal guide an odd look. Cael started as a flush working its way through his soft fur. Hikosu smiled softly at the two's banter, knocking her shoulder into Ron's as she made her way after Hermione.

Both of the girls didn't turn up for the next class and weren't seen all afternoon. Cael stayed with Harry, but Fayen soon grew restless. She didn't know the people in the castle as well as the wolf animal guide did and decided to get herself acquainted with the workings of the castle. After telling her superior of her intentions, she went off to explore the castle.

Harry, Ron, and Cael soon made their way to the Great Hall for the feast. On their way, however, the three of them overheard Parvati Patil telling her friend Lavender that Hermione was crying in the girls' bathroom and wanted to be left alone, but that Hikosu had stayed with her. Ron looked still more awkward at this, but a moment later they had entered the Great Hall, where the Halloween decorations had put Hermione out of their minds...but Harry could still feel a little tug of worry on the edge of his subconsciousness. It was odd for he wasn't the one feeling worried.

A thousand live bats fluttered from the walls and ceiling while a thousand more swooped over the tables in low black clouds, making the candles in the pumpkins stutter. The feast appeared suddenly on the golden plates, as it had at the start-of-term banquet.

Harry was just helping himself to a baked potato when Professor Quirrell came sprinting into the hall, his turban askew and terror on his face. Everyone stared as he reached Professor Dumbledore's

chair, slumped against the table, and gasped, "Troll – in the dungeons – thought you ought to know."

He then sank to the floor in a dead faint. Harry had never felt so scared because he didn't have Hikosu in his line of sight. Cael was growling next to him, obviously berating himself for letting his charge wander off on her own. She was only eleven!

There was an uproar. It took several purple firecrackers exploding from the end of Professor Dumbledore's wand to bring silence.

"Prefects," he rumbled, "lead your Houses back to the dormitories immediately!"

Percy was in his element.

"Follow me! Stick together, first years! No need to fear the troll if you follow my orders! Stay close behind me, now. Make way, first years coming through! Excuse me, I'm a Prefect!"

"How could a troll get in?" Harry asked as they climbed the stairs. Cael wanted to go look for his mistress, but he had promised her that he would stay with Harry. He only hoped that Feyen would be able to get to her.

"Don't ask me, they're supposed to be really stupid," said Ron. "Maybe Peeves let it in for a Halloween joke."

They passed different groups of people hurrying in different directions. As they jostled their way through a crowd of confused Hufflepuffs, Harry suddenly grabbed Ron's arm.

"I've just thought – Hermione and Hikosu!"

"What about them?"

"They don't know about the troll!"

"Oh, all right," he snapped. "For Hikosu. But Percy'd better not see us." And with a yip from Cael they were off.

Ducking down, they joined the Hufflepuffs going the other way, slipped down a deserted side corridor, and hurried off toward the

girls' bathroom. They had just turned the corner when they heard quick footsteps behind them.

"Percy!" hissed Ron, pulling Harry behind a large stone griffin before Cael could tell them otherwise.

Peering around it, however, they saw not Percy, but Severus. He crossed the corridor and disappeared from view.

"What's he doing?" Harry whispered. "Why isn't he down in the dungeons with the rest of the teachers?"

"Maybe he's looking for Hikosu?" it made sense. She was his daughter, after all.

Quietly as possible, they crept along the next corridor after Severus' fading footsteps.

"He's heading for the third floor," the emerald eyed boy said, but Ron held up his hand as the wolf animal guide let out a whimper.

"Can you smell something?"

Harry sniffed and a foul stench reached his nostrils, a mixture of old socks and the kind of public toilet no one seems to clean.

And then they heard it – a low grunting, and the shuffling footfalls of gigantic feet. Ron pointed – at the end of a passage to the left, something huge was moving toward them. the three of them shrank into the shadows and watched as it emerged into a patch of moonlight.

It was a horrible sight. Twelve feet tall, its skin was a dull, granite gray, its great lumpy body like a boulder with its small bald head perched on top like a coconut. It had short legs thick as tree trunks with flat, horny feet. The smell coming from it was incredible. It was holding a huge wooden club, which dragged along the floor because its arms were so long.

The troll stopped next to the doorway and peered inside. It waggled its long ears, making up its tiny mind, then slouched slowly into the room.

"The key's in the loc," Harry muttered. "We could lock it in."

"Good idea," said Ron nervously.

They edged toward the open door, mouths dry, praying the troll wasn't about to come out of it. With one great leap, Harry managed to grab the key, slam the door, and lock it.

"Yes!"

Flushed with their victory, they started to run back up the passage, but as they reached the corner they heard something that made their hearts stop – a high, petrified scream – and it was coming from the chamber they'd just chained up. Suddenly, both Cael and Harry felt a subdued feeling of terror flash through their bodies.

"Oh, no," said Ron, pale as the Bloody Baron.

"It's the girls' bathroom!" Harry gasped.

"Hermione, Hikosu!" they said together.

It was the last thing they wanted to do, but what choice did they have? Harry was scared, but the wolf animal guide was already clawing at the door, trying to get in. He was snarling and his eyes were wild with anger. Wheeling around, the two wizards sprinted back to the door and turned the key, fumbling in their panic. Harry pulled the door open and they ran inside.

Hermione Granger was shrinking against the wall opposite, looking as if she was about to faint. The troll was advancing on her, knocking the sinks off the walls as it went. Hikosu was crouched over the other girl, shaking as a trail of blood was running down her temple. The emerald eyed boy's heart gave a lurch as Cael's growl intensified.

"Confuse it!" Harry said desperately to Ron, and, seizing a tap, he threw it as hard as he could against the wall.

The troll stopped a few feet from Hermione. It lumbered around, blinking stupidly, to see what had made the noise. Its mean little eyes saw Harry. It hesitated, then made for him instead, lifting its club as it went.

Harry! Hikosu exclaimed, causing him to steal a glance her way. With a loud growl, Cael jumped on the back of the troll, giving him the opportunity to rush to his best female friend's site.

"Bloody Hell, Hikosu." He breathed, pressing the corner of his robe to her forehead. He took it off so she could have easy access to it as she told him what happened.

When the troll attacked we were caught off guard. He destroyed one of the stalls...and the wood beamed me in the head. She said, pointing to the rather large gash on her forehead. A howl from Cael brought their attention back to the ogre. Hikosu stood, but her vision swam as she sunk back to the ground. Harry looked down at her, worry evident in his emerald gaze. It was up to him and Ron since Hermione's wand was all the way across the room.

"Oy, pea-brain!" yelled Ron from the other side of the chamber, and he threw a metal pipe at it. The troll didn't even seem to notice the pipe hitting its shoulder, but it heard the yell and paused again, turning its ugly snout toward Ron instead, giving Harry time to try to convince Hermione to move.

"Come on, run. Run!" Harry yelled at Hermione, trying to pull her toward the door, but she couldn't move, she was still flat against the wall, her mouth open with terror.

The shouting, growling, and the echoes seemed to be driving the troll berserk. It roared again and started toward Ron, who was nearest and had no way to escape. Despite all the damage that Cael had done to his flesh, the troll seemed to have a one track mind.

Harry then did something that was both very brave and very stupid: he took a great running jump and managed to fasten his arms around the troll's neck from behind. The troll couldn't feel Harry hanging there, but even a troll with notice if you stick a long bit of wood up its nose, and Harry's wand had still been in his hand when he'd jumped – it had gone straight up one of the troll's nostrils.

Oh, Harry, be careful! Hikosu exclaimed in fright. Howling with pain, the troll twisted and flailed its club, with Harry clinging on for dear life; any second, the troll was going to rip him off or catch him a terrible blow with the club.

Hermione had sunk to the floor in fright with Hikosu still kneeling over her. Ron pulled out his own wand – not knowing what he was going to do he heard himself cry the first spell that came into his head: "Wingardium Leviosa!"

The club flew suddenly out of the troll's hand, rose high, high up into the air, turned slowly over – and dropped, with a sickening crack, onto the owner's head. The troll swayed on the spot and then fell flat on its face, with a thud that made the whole room tremble.

Harry got to his feet. He was shaking and out of breath. Ron was standing there with his wand still raised, but Cael had morphed into his humanoid form, scooping the silver eyed girl into his arms.

I am sorry for not being here, little one. I will not fail you again. He swore to her as she buried her face into his chest like a small child would do to an elder sibling.

It was Hermione who spoke out loud first.

"Is it – dead?"

"I don't think so," said Harry, "I think it's just been knocked out."

He bent down and pulled his wand out of the troll's nose. It was covered in what looked like lumpy gray glue.

"Urgh – troll boogers."

He wiped it on the troll's trousers.

A sudden slamming and loud footsteps and made the three of them looked up. They hadn't realized what a racket they had been making, but of course, someone downstairs must have heard the crashes and the troll's roars. A moment later, Fayen had come bounding through the door with her fangs bared. She gave off a soft roar of her own at the fallen troll before morphing and hurrying to Hikosu, who gave her a half-hug. She was still trembling slightly as the female animal guide inspected the wound on her head.

A moment later, Professor McGonagall had come bursting into the room, closely followed by Severus, with Quirrell bringing up the rear.

Quirrell took one look at the troll, let out a faint whimper, and sat quickly down on a toilet, clutching his heart.

Severus made his way towards his daughter, eyes immediately darkening as he spotted the wound on her head. He glared at the three Gryffindors, almost silently accusing them of harming his daughter. He almost said something, but Hikosu's voice whispered in his mind.

Papa... it wasn't what she said, but how she said it. Her voice was breaking and her lower lip wobbled as she looked up at him. Her silver eyes were glassy; she had never been so scared in her entire life. She lifted her arms from around Cael's neck and gestured towards her father, lips still wobbling.

Severus was quick to lift his surprisingly light daughter from Cael's arms. She wrapped her arms around her father's neck and nuzzled her face into his broad shoulder.

Professor McGonagall was looking at Ron and Harry. Harry had never seen her look so angry. Her lips were white. Hopes of winning fifty points for Gryffindor faded quickly from Harry's mind.

"What on earth were you thinking of?" said Professor McGonagall, with cold fury in her voice. Harry looked at Ron, who was still standing with his wand in the air. "You're lucky you weren't killed. Why aren't you in your dormitory?"

Severus gave Harry a swift, piercing look as Cael mentally filled him in on the situation. Harry looked at the floor. He wished Ron would put his wand down.

Then a small voice came out of the shadows.

"Please, Professor McGonagall – they were looking for Hikosu and me."

"Miss Granger!"

Hermione had managed to get to her feet at last.

"I went looking for the troll because I – I thought I could deal with it on my own – you know, because I've read all about them. Hikosu

found me and told Cael and Fayen to find Harry and Ron. Cael found them."

Ron dropped his wand. Hermione Granger, telling a downright lie to a teacher?

"If they hadn't found me, I'd be dead now. Hikosu shielded me when the troll destroyed the stalls. Harry stuck his wand up its nose and Ron knocked it out with its own club. Cael bit and scratched at it, but it wouldn't be deterred. They didn't have any time to fetch anyone – be glad that Fayen could smell us out. It was about to finish me off when they arrived."

Harry and Ron tried to look as though this story wasn't new to them.

"Well – in that case..." said Professor McGonagall, staring at the three of them, "Miss Granger, you foolish girl, how could you think of tackling a mountain troll on your own?"

Hermione hung her head. Harry was speechless. Hermione was the last person to do anything against the rules, and here she was, pretending she had, to get them out of trouble. It was as if Severus had started wearing a pink tutu to his Potions classes.

"Miss Granger, five points will be taken from Gryffindor for this," said Professor McGonagall. "I'm very disappointed in you. If you're not hurt at all, you'd better get off to Gryffindor tower. Students are finishing the feast in their houses."

Hermione left.

Professor McGonagall turned to Harry and Ron.

"Well, I still say you were lucky, but not many first years could have taken on a full-grown mountain troll. You each win Gryffindor five points. Professor Dumbledore will be informed of this. You may go."

"Severus, it may be wise to take Hikosu to the hospital wing." The Transfiguration Professor suggested, but the Potions Master just glared. He was going to take his daughter to their chambers and take care of her himself. Not that he didn't trust Poppy Pomfrey, but he would rather make sure she was fully healed.



Harry and Ron hurried out of the chamber and didn't speak at all until they had climbed two floors up. It was a relief to be away from the smell of the troll, quite apart from anything else.

"We should have gotten more than ten points," Ron grumbled. Harry was still a little worried about Hikosu, but he just couldn't ignore Ron's conversation.

"Five, you mean, once she's taken off Hermione's."

"Good of her to get us out of trouble like that," Ron admitted. "Mind you, we did save her."

"She might not have needed saving if we hadn't locked the thing in with her...and Hikosu was in there, too." Harry reminded him.

They had reached the portrait of the Fat Lady.

"Pig snout," they said and entered.

The common room was packed and noisy. Everyone was eating the food that had been sent up. Hermione, however, stood alone by the door, waiting for them. There was a very embarrassed pause. Then, none of them looked at each other, they all said "Thanks," and hurried off to get plates.

But from that moment on, Hermione Granger became Harry and Ron's friend. The group was expanded, now made up of Harry, Hikosu, Cael, Fayen, Ron, and now Hermione. There are some things you can't share without ending up liking each other, and knocking out a twelve-foot mountain troll is one of them.

I'm so sorry this is so late. I never intended for it to be months later...geeze. I'm sorry, but things came up. For example...I had exams and final projects. Then, I had my wisdom teeth removed and had a bad reaction to the medicine. Then christmas (and I started a new fic) and I was trying to figure out which suggestions to use =P you guys gave me good ones!

Thanks to:

Forever Dreaming Grace

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Raine44354

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mysterygirl123 - maybe just a little =P

midnightangelxoxo

Infernoinside

for their reviews! I'm sorry that I didn't actually respond to anyone's besides mysterygirl123's, but I just didn't have the time...and I didn't want to have a giant author's note.

PLEASE VOTE ON MY POLL! It's kinda important to me =D

Chapter Eleven

Quidditch

As they entered November, the weather turned very cold. The mountains around the school became icy gray and the lake like chilled steel. Every morning the ground was covered in frost. Hagrid could be seen from the upstairs windows defrosting the broomsticks on the Quidditch field, bundled up in a long moleskin overcoat, rabbit fur gloves, and enormous beaverskin boots. It was a bad time for

Hikosu for she hated the cold. She was extremely sensitive to things like changes in the seasons. She was lucky that she didn't get sick – Severus would have thrown a fit.

At least she had her wolf and her snow leopard animal companions to keep her warm at night.

The Quidditch season had begun. On Saturday, Harry would be playing in his first match after weeks of training: Gryffindor versus Slytherin. If Gryffindor won, they would move up into second place in the house championship. He was nervous about the game, but every time his mind drifted towards having a nervous breakdown Hikosu was always there to send a warm and calming nudge through their link. Although they were only eleven, their bond was growing stronger every passing day.

Hardly anyone had seen Harry play because Wood had decided that, as their secret weapon, Harry should be kept, well, secret. But the news that he was playing Seeker had leaked out somehow, and Harry didn't know which was worse – people telling him he'd be brilliant or people telling him they'd be running around underneath him holding a mattress.

It was really lucky that Harry now had Hermione as a friend. He didn't know how he'd have gotten through all his homework without her, what with all the last-minute Quidditch practice Wood was making them do. She had also lent him Quidditch Through the Ages, which turned out to be a very interesting read. Instead of studying in the Gryffindor Tower, as Hikosu wasn't allowed there when she didn't have a dorm there that semester, the four of them either studied in the library or under the watchful eye of Severus in her quarters. More often than not they were in the library. Severus' glares were brutal at times!

Harry learned that there were seven hundred ways of committing a Quidditch foul and that all of them had happened during a World Cup match in 1437; that Seekers were usually the smallest and fastest players, and that most Serious Quidditch accidents seemed to happen to them; that although people rarely died playing Quidditch, referees had been known to vanish and turn up months later in the Sahara Desert.

Hermione had become a bit more relaxed about breaking rules since Harry and Ron had saved her from the mountain troll, and she was much nicer for it. The day before Harry's first Quidditch match the three of them were out in the freezing courtyard during break, and she had conjured them up a bright blue fire that could be carried around in a jam jar. They were standing with their backs to it, getting warm, when Snape crossed the yard. Harry noticed at once that Snape was limping. Harry, Ron, and Hermione moved closer together to block the fire from view; they were sure it wouldn't be allowed. Unfortunately, something about their guilty faces caught Snape's eye. He limped over. He hadn't seen the fire, but he seemed to be looking for a reason to tell them off anyway. The silver eyed girl, along with Fayen and Cael, was by the dark haired professor's side. She was frowning in worry, sending the three of them an apologetic glance.

I'm sorry about Papa, Harry. He's hurting and he won't let Cael or Fayen look at it. I don't even know how he got it...so the pain is the reason why he's being so mean. She said right before the four of them reached the trio. Her worry was slipping through her bond and the emerald eyed boy picked up on it. He wondered what happened.

"What's that you've got there, Potter?"

It was Quidditch Through the Ages. Harry showed him, still worried.

"Library books are not to be taken outside the school," said Snape. "Give it to me. Five points from Gryffindor."

"He's just made that rule up," Harry muttered angrily as Snape limped away. "Wonder what's wrong with his leg?"

"Dunno, but I hope it's really hurting him," said Ron bitterly. Hikosu glared at him before kicking Ron in the shin. Both Fayen and Cael growled menacingly at the red headed boy before the wolf phased and spoke.

"You would do well to respect your elders, Ronald. He had his reasons for what he does." And with that he sent a hard look towards Harry. Perhaps he wasn't the boy that the wolf animal guide thought he was. Harry almost instantly felt a bout of horrible guilt. He remembered the times that he was cranky because he had been hurt by his cousin. He had no room to speak.

I'm sorry... he tried to tell them through their bond, but the silver eyed girl only sent him a disappointed look as she was being led away by her wolf animal guide.

The Gryffindor common room was very noisy that evening. Harry, Ron, and Hermione sat together next to a window. Hermione was checking Harry and Ron's Charms homework for them. She would never let them copy – how would they learn? – but by asking her to read it through, they got the right answers anyway.

Harry felt restless. He wanted Quidditch Through the Ages back, to take his mind off his nerves about tomorrow. He had tried to send Hikosu messages through their enchanted parchment and only received messages from Cael. Had he confiscated it from her? Fayen was lying at his feet – the silver eyed girl felt that one of them should be with him at all times for some reason – but that didn't explain why she wasn't answering his parchment calls.

He got up, deciding that he was going to go find the two of them. Lucky girl was allowed to be in the Teacher's Lounge because her father was a Professor. Why should he be afraid of Snape anyway? Getting up, he told Ron and Hermione he was going to ask Snape if he could have it.

"Better you than me," they said together, but Harry had an idea that Snape wouldn't refuse if there were other teachers listening. Or, he would be nicer if his daughter was there. He noticed that the man was only cruel to others when Hikosu wasn't there. It was like she drew out the kindness within him, which was an amazing feat in itself.

Harry made his way down to the staffroom and knocked. There was no answer. He knocked again. Nothing.

Harry, what are you doing? Came Hikosu's curious voice from behind him. The boy jumped, whirling around. He sighed in relief when he saw that she wasn't mad at him anymore. He opened his arms and she hugged him, letting him wrap his arms around her as well.

I wanted my book back. Where's Cael? He responded, noticing that she was alone.

Inside. I had to go to the bathroom. She replied with a giggle. He nodded and turned back to the lounge.

Perhaps Snape had left the book in there? It was worth a try. He pushed the door ajar and peered inside – and a horrible scene met his eyes. Snape and Filch were inside, alone with only Cael for comfort. Said animal guide was holding his glowing hands above the wound as Snape was holding his robes above his knees. One of his legs was bloody and mangled. Filch was handing Snape bandages.

He felt his best friend take in a soundless gasp of air and her hand quickly found his own.

"Blasted thing," Snape was saying. "How are you supposed to keep your eyes on all three heads at once?"

Harry tried to shut the door quietly, but –

"POTTER!"

Snape's face was twisted with fury as he dropped his robes quickly to hide his leg. Harry gulped and he felt Hikosu tense from behind him.

"I just wondered if I could have my book back."

"GET OUT! OUT!"

Harry, leave. I'll take care of Papa. Hikosu said in a shaky voice, Tell Fayen what happened.

Harry left, before Snape could take any more points from Gryffindor and only because the silver eyed girl told him to. If she hadn't said anything he would have stayed there with her. He knew how much her father meant to her and when he was hurt she was hurt. Maybe not physically, but she was emotionally.

He sprinted back upstairs.

"Did you get it?" Ron asked as Harry joined them. "What's the matter?"

In a low whisper, Harry told them what he'd seen.

"You know what this means?" he finished breathlessly. "He tried to get past that three-headed dog at Halloween! That's where he was going when we saw him – he's after whatever it's guarding! And I'd bet my broomstick he let that troll in, to make a diversion!"

"You don't know that, Harry." Came Faye's calm voice. She was curious and doubtful, but she put her full trust in her Mistress' father.

Hermione's eyes were wide.

"No – he wouldn't." she said. "I know he's not very nice, but he wouldn't try and steal something Dumbledore was keeping safe."

"Honestly, Hermione, you think all teachers are saints or something," snapped Ron. "I'm with Harry. I wouldn't put anything past Snape. But what's he after? What's that dog guarding?"

Harry went to bed with his head buzzing with the same question. Neville was snoring loudly, but Harry couldn't sleep. He tried to empty his mind – he needed to sleep, he had to, he had his first Quidditch match in a few hours – but the expression on Snape's face when Harry had seen his leg wasn't easy to forget.

The next morning dawned very bright and cold. The Great Hall was full of the delicious smell of fried sausages and the cheerful chatter of everyone looking forward to a good Quidditch match.

"You've got to eat some breakfast."

"I don't want anything."

"Just a bit of toast," wheedled Hermione.

"I'm not hungry."

Harry felt terrible, but as soon as a familiar face sat right in front of him it was like all of his troubles washed away.

Harry...eat a piece of toast for me? the silver haired girl asked, handing him a piece of the buttered toast. He did so only because she asked. He would literally do anything the silver eyed girl asked

of him. He trusted her that much. She gave him a small smile when her animal guides sat next to her, both giving her small glares. She had hurried to the table and the two of them had lost her in a throng of students, but they knew she was alright in the castle.

Harry was grateful for her presence. In an hour's time he'd be walking onto the field.

"Harry, you need your strength," said Seamus Finnigan. "Seekers are always the ones who get clobbered by the other team." He then winced – he had been kicked in the shin by Hikosu.

"Thanks, Seamus," said Harry, watching Seamus pile ketchup on his sausages after he rubbed the pain from his injured leg.

By eleven o'clock the whole school seemed to be out in the stands around the Quidditch pitch. Many students had binoculars. The seats might be raised high in the air, but it was still difficult to see what was going on sometimes.

Ron and Hermione joined Neville, Seamus, and Dean the West Ham fan up in the top row. As a surprise for Harry, they had painted a large banner on one of the sheets Scabbers had ruined. It said Potter for President, and Dean, who was good at drawing, had done a large Gryffindor lion underneath. Then Hermione had performed a tricky little charm so that the paint flashed different colors. Hikosu had also helped Dean paint over the lion with specialized colors so it seemed like it was real.

Unfortunately, since she didn't belong to any one house, she had to go sit with the Professors. She didn't mind, but she had wanted to watch the game with her friends. Perhaps in the future she would be able to ask Dumbledore if she could watch the games with her friends.

Meanwhile, in the locker room, Harry and the rest of the team were changing to their scarlet Quidditch robes (Slytherin would be playing in green).

Wood cleared his throat for silence.

"Okay, men," he said.



"And women," said Chaser Angelina Johnson.

"And women," Wood agreed. "This is it."

"The big one," said Fred Weasley.

"The one we've all been waiting for," said George.

"We know Oliver's speech by heart," Fred told Harry, "we were on the team last year."

"Shut up, you two," said Wood. "This is the best team Gryffindor's had in years. We're going to win. I know it."

He glared at them all as if to say, "Or else."

"Right. It's time. Goo dluck, all of you."

Harry followed Fred and George out of the locker room and, hoping his knees weren't going to give way, walked onto the field to loud cheers.

Madam Hooch was refereeing. She stood in the middle of the field waiting for the two teams, her broom in her hand.

"Now, I want a nice fair game, all of you," she said once they were all gathered around her. Harry noticed that she seemed to be speaking particularly to the Slytherin Captain, Marcus Flint, a sixth year. Harry thought Flint looked as if he had some troll blood in him. out of the corner of his eye he saw the fluttering banner high above, flashing Potter for President over the crowd. His heart skipped. He felt braver.

"Mount your brooms, please."

Harry clambered onto his Nimbus Two Thousand.

Madam Hooch gave a loud blast on her silver whistle.

Fifteen brooms rose up, high, high into the air. They were off. Out of the corner of his eye he though he saw Hikosu standing with a giant smile on her face, Cael and Feyen beside her in their animal forms. They were howling and roaring in time with the cheers.

He felt brave.

"And the Quaffle is taken immediately by Angelina Johnson of Gryffindor – what an excellent Chaser that girl is, and rather attractive, too –"

"JORDAN!"

"Sorry, Professor."

The Weasley twins' friend, Lee Jordan, was doing the commentary for the match, closely watched by Professor McGonagall.

"And she's really belting along up there, a neat pass to Alicia Spinnet, a good find of Oliver Wood's, last year only a reserve – back to Johnson and – no, the Slytherins have taken the Quaffle, Slytherin Captain Marcus Flint gains the Quaffle and off he goes – Flint flying like an eagle up there – he's going to sc...no, stopped by an excellent move by Gryffindor Keeper Wood and the Gryffindors take the Quaffle – that's Chaser Katie Bell of Gryffindor there, nice dive around Flint, off up the field and – OUCH – that must have hurt, hit in the back of the head by a Bludger – Quaffle taken by the Slytherins – that's Adrian Pucey speeding off towards the goal posts, but he's blocked by a second Bludger – sent his way by Fred or George Weasley, can't tell which – nice play by the Gryffindor Beater, anyway, and Johnson back in possession of the Quaffle, a clear field ahead and off she goes – she's really flying – dodges a speeding Bludger – the goal posts are ahead – come on, now, Angelina – Keeper Bletchley dives – misses – GRYFFINDORS SCORE!"

Gryffindor cheers filled the cold air, with howls and moans from the Slytherins.

"Budge up there, move along."

"Hagrid!"

Ron and Hermione squeezed together to give Hagrid enough space to join them.

"Bin watchin' from me hut," said Hagrid, patting a large pair of binoculars around his neck, "But it isn't the same as bein' in the crowd. No sign of the Snitch yet, eh?"

"Nope," said Ron. "Harry hasn't had much to do yet."

"Kept outta trouble, though, that's somethin'," said Hagrid, raising his binoculars and peering skyward at the speck that was Harry.

Way up above them, Harry was gliding over the game, squinting about for some sign of the Snitch. This was part of his and Wood's game plan.

"Keep out of the way until you catch sight of the Snitch," Wood had said. "We don't want you attacked before you have to be."

When Angelina had scored, Harry had done a couple of loop-the-loops to let out his feelings. Now he was back to staring around for the Snitch. Once he caught sight of a flash of gold, but it was just a reflection from one of the Weasleys' wristwatches, and once a Bludger decided to come pelting his way, more like a cannonball than anything, but Harry dodged it and Fred Weasley came chasing after it.

"All right there, Harry?" he had time to yell, as he beat the Bludger furiously toward Marcus Flint.

"Slytherin in possession," Lee Jordan was saying, "Chaser Pucey ducks two Bludgers, two Weasley, and Chaser Bell, and speeds toward the – wait a moment – was that the Snitch?"

A murmur ran through the crowd as Adrian Pucey dropped the Quaffle, too busy looking over his shoulder at the flash of gold that had passed his left ear.

Harry saw it. In a great rush of excitement he dived downward after the streak of gold. Slytherin Seeker Terence Higgs had seen it, too. Neck and neck they hurtled toward the Snitch – all the Chasers seemed to have forgotten what they were supposed to be doing as they hung in midair to watch.

Harry was faster than Higgs – he could see the little round ball, wings fluttering, darting up ahead – he put on an extra spurt of speed...

WHAM! A roar of rage echoed from the Gryffindors below – Marcus Flint had blocked Harry on purpose, and Harry's broom spun off course, Harry holding on for dear life.

Hikosu was furious. She turned to her father, who also had a furious expression on his face. Although he hated Harry for being James' son, he didn't want the boy to die. If the boy died then his daughter would be miserable and the feelings of his daughter always came first when it came to him.

Papa, is that legal? She asked him in an angered voice as Cael growled next to her. He was not a happy camper. Faye hissed at a passing Slytherin, making him squeak and jerk his broom away from the stands. Her father only shook his head, a sneer forming on his face.

"Foul!" screamed the Gryffindors.

Madam Hooch spoke angrily to Flint and then ordered a free shot at the goal posts for Gryffindor. But in all the confusion, of course, the Golden Snitch had disappeared from sight again.

Down in the stands, Dean Thomas was yelling, "Send him off, ref! Red card!"

"What are you talking about, Dean?" said Ron.

"Red card!" said Dean furiously. "In soccer you get shown the red card and you're out of the game!"

"But this isn't soccer, Dean," Ron reminded him.

Hagrid, however, was on Dean's side.

"They oughta change the rules. Flint coulda knocked Harry outta the air."

Lee Jordan was finding it difficult not to take sides.

"So – after that obvious and disgusting bit of cheating..."

"Jordan!" growled Professor McGonagall.

"I mean, after that open and revolting foul..."

"Jordan, I'm warning you..."

"All right, all right. Flint nearly kills the Gryffindor Seeker, which could happen to anyone, I'm sure, so a penalty to Gryffindor, taken by Spinnet, who puts it away, no trouble, and we continue play, Gryffindor still in possession."

It was as Harry dodged another Bludger, which went spinning dangerously past his head, that it happened. His broom gave a sudden, frightening lurch. For a split second, he thought he was going to fall. He gripped the broom tightly with both his hands and knees. He'd never felt anything like that.

It happened again. It was as though the broom was trying to buck him off. But Nimbus Two Thousands did not suddenly decide to buck their riders off. Harry tried to turn back toward the Gryffindor goal posts – he had half a mind to ask Wood to call time-out – and then he realized that his broom was completely out of his control. He couldn't turn it. He couldn't direct it at all. It was ziazagging through the air, and every now and then making violent swishing movements that almost unseated him.

Perhaps everyone else was concerned with the game, but Hikosu never took her eyes off of Harry. She jerked her father's frock coat sleeve and pointed to the boy.

Papa! Papa, what's going on? She exclaimed, biting her bottom lip. He didn't answer her; instead, he started to chant underneath his breath.

It seems like someone's cursing his broomstick, little one. Cael commented as he and the snow leopard beside him looked to the boy in concern.

Lee was still commenting.

"Slytherin in possession – Flint with the Quaffle – passes Spinnet – passes Bell – hit hard in the face by a Bludger, hope it broke his nose – only joking, Professor – Slytherins score – oh no..."

The Slytherins were cheering. No one seemed to have noticed that Harry's broom was behaving strangely. It was carrying him slowly higher, away from the game, jerking and twitching as it went.

"Dunno what Harry thinks he's doing," Hagrid mumbled. He stared through his binoculars. "If I didn' know better, I'd say he'd lost control of his broom...but he can't have..."

Suddenly, people were pointing up at Harry all over the stands.

His broom had started to roll over and over, with him only just managing to hold on. Then the whole crowd gasped. Harry's broom had given a wild jerk and Harry swung off it. He was now dangling from it, holding on with only one hand.

"Did something happen to it when Flint blocked him?" Seamus whispered.

"Can't have," Hagrid said, his voice shaking. "Can't nothing interfere with a broomstick except powerful Dark magic – no kid could do that to a Nimbus Two Thousand."

At these words, Hermione seized Hagrid's binoculars, but instead of looking up at Harry, she started looking frantically at the crowd.

"What are you doing?" moaned Ron, gray-faced.

"I knew it," Hermione gasped, "Snape – look."

Ron grabbed the binoculars. Snape was in the middle of the stands opposite them. He had his eyes fixed on Harry and was muttering nonstop under his breath.

"He's doing something – jinxing the broom," said Hermione.

"What should we do?"

"Leave it to me."

Before Ron could say another word, Hermione had disappeared. Ron turned the binoculars back on Harry. His broom was vibrating so hard, it was almost impossible for him to hang on much longer. The whole crowd was on its feet, watching, terrified, as the Weasleys flew up to try and pull Harry safely onto one of their brooms, but it was no good – every time they got near him, the broom would jump higher still. They dropped lower and circled beneath him, obviously hoping to catch him if he fell. Marcus Flint seized the Quaffle and scored five times without anyone noticing.

"Come on, Hermione," Ron muttered desperately.

Hermione had fought her way across to the stand where Snape stood, and was now racing along the row behind him; she didn't even stop to say sorry as she knocked Professor Quirrell headfirst into the row in front. Reaching Snape, she crouched down, pulled out her wand, and whispered a few, well-chosen words. Bright blue flames shot from her wand onto the hem of Snape's robes.

What she didn't know was the fact that it wasn't the older man's robes she set on fire. It was Hikosu's.

It took perhaps thirty seconds for the silver eyed girl to realize that she was on fire. A high pitched scream told Hermione that she had done her job, but she didn't stop to think that the voice was a little too high pitched to be the Professor's voice. Scooping the fire off him into a little jar in her pocket, she scrambled back along the row – Snape would never know what had happened.

When the silver eyed girl had screamed, Severus' attention was immediately reverted from Harry to his daughter. His heart started pumping double time when he saw that her robes were on fire. The dark haired male hissed in slight panic as he used his wand to put out what was left of the fire – obviously Hermione didn't get it all from when she set Hikosu's robe on fire. His daughter looked up with watery eyes and he enveloped her in a hug as she cried.

It was enough. Up in the air, Harry was suddenly able to clamber back on to his broom, but he had a feeling that something was very wrong with his silver eyed best friend.

"Neville, you can look!" Ron said. Neville had been sobbing into Hagrid's jacket for the last five minutes.

Harry was speeding toward the ground when the crowd saw him clap his hand to his mouth as though he was about to be sick – he hit the field on all fours – coughed – and something gold fell into his hand.

"I've got the Snitch!" he shouted, waving it above his head, and the game ended in complete confusion.

"He didn't catch it, he nearly swallowed it," Flint was still howling twenty minutes later, but it made no difference – Harry hadn't broken any rules and Lee Jordan was still happily shouting the results – Gryffindor had won by one hundred and seventy points to sixty. Harry heard none of this, though. He was being made a cup of strong tea back in Hagrid's hut, with Ron and Hermione. Hikosu was also there, but she was glaring at both Ron and Hermione. They were accusing her father of tried to curse Harry.

"It was Snape," Ron was explaining, "Hermione and I saw him. He was cursing your broomstick, muttering, he wouldn't take his eyes off you."

"Rubbish," said Hagrid, who hadn't heard a word of what had gone on next to him in the stands. "Why would Snape do somethin' like that?"

Harry, Ron, and Hermione looked at one another, wondering what to tell him. Harry decided the truth.

"I found out something about him," he told Hagrid. "He tried to get past that three-headed dog on Halloween. It bit him. We think he was trying to steal whatever it's guarding."

Harry, you're making a mistake. How do you know he's not trying to protect whatever it is? The girl huffed, getting up and leaving the hut as Hagrid dropped the teapot. This time it was Cael who stayed behind as Feyen followed the angered Animalia. Harry felt guilty once again, but he was also severely confused. Who should he believe.

"How do you know about Fluffy?" Hagrid asked.

"Fluffy?"



"Yeah – he's mine – bought him off a Greek chappie I met in the put las' year – I lent him to Dumbledore to guard the..."

"Yes?" said Harry eagerly.

"Now, don't ask me anymore," said Hagrid gruffly. "That's top secret, that is."

"But Snape's trying to steal it."

"Rubbish." Said Hagrid again. "Snape's a Hogwarts teacher, he'd do nothin' of the sort."

"So why did he just try and kill Harry?" cried Hermione.

The afternoon's events certainly seemed to have changed her mind about Snape.

"I know a jinx when I see one, Hagrid, I've read all about them! You've got to keep eye contact, and Snape wasn't blinking at all, I saw him!"

"I'm tellin' yeh, yer wrong!" said Hagrid hotly. "I don' know why harry's broom acted like that, but Snape wouldn' try an' kill a student! Now, listen to me, all three of yeh – yer meddlin' in things that don' concern yeh. It's dangerous. You forget that dog, an' you forget what it's guardin', that's between Professor Dumbledore an' Nicolas Flamel..."

"Aha!" said Harry, "so there's someone called Nicolas Flamel involved, is there?"

Hagrid looked furious with himself.

Please, PLEASE, vote on my poll? Please? Pretty please?

Thanks to:

Child Of The Night Wolves12 - Eep! Well, I updated! Severus is a bit OOC in this chapter, but I thought it was kind of funny.

Raine44354 - XD Aww, thanks. Glad you like the story enough to be thrilled.

unseen constant - Yeah, but I'm trying to write in the mindset of an 11 year old. He'd, of course, believe her, but then he would want to believe his other friends, too. Subconsciously, he always believes that Severus is innocent, but the way his friends are all arguing he has the right to be a little bit confused.

littledhampir13 - I apologize for not having any Draco in this part, but I'll be sure to put in a little Draco action in the next chapter. It'll be just between Draco and Hikosu, how about that? =D

GinnyLover14 - I hope you like this chapter more than you liked the last one.

Please VOTE ON MY POLL!

## Chapter Twelve

### The Mirror of Erised

Things had been going downhill for Hikosu ever since Hermione had set her robes on fire thinking she was setting Severus' robes on fire. She was now terribly afraid of anything that had to do with the object. Instead of cuddling in front of the fire with her animal guides or snuggling into her father's lap while he read her a book, she curled up with a blanket in the furthest corner of the room.

"Hikosu, love, why don't you join me?" Severus asked for what seemed like the millionth time that month as he gestured towards the chair next to the fireplace. She had been getting better at being in a room with fire. She no longer screamed voicelessly, having flashbacks of her robes being set on fire. Severus cleverly set up a grate in front of the fire – it was made of iron and glass. She could

see the fire, but it couldn't touch her. More importantly, it couldn't harm her.

It wasn't just the fire that was bothering her. She was questioning her friends. At first she thought that Hermione Granger and Ronald Weasley would be friends that she could count on, friends that she could trust...but then they had started to accuse her father of trying to hurt Harry.

She knew something was going on. She had heard Professor Quirrell start chanting in front of her that day. She didn't know what he was doing – whether or not he was chanting a counter curse like her father had been doing – but when she asked her father about the turban wearing Professor...Severus had taken her by the shoulders, knelt in front of her, and told her never to talk to Professor Quirrell alone. He was a bad man.

Harry...she told him time and time again that her father was innocent and she knew that Harry knew that she was right. There was the tiniest bit of doubt within his mind, but that was due to the fact that he didn't know Severus well enough and he didn't have the knowledge that Severus provided her with. It was like the dark haired Professor was a completely different person when he was with his daughter.

Okay... she whispered, surprising her father. He had offered to read to her every night for the past week, knowing that somehow his deep voice lulled her to sleep, but each time she had denied being read to. Her acceptance meant that she was getting over her traumatic experiences.

"What do you want me to read about?" he questioned, taking note that his daughter had an unusual interest in magical creatures.

Dragons? She questioned with an innocent gaze. Severus chuckled, flicking his wand to summon the book they had been reading before the incident. It was a book on different dragons of the world. They had last stopped on the East Asian Dragon.

"Alright. Come here, little one." He said and patted his lap. Fayen and Cale shifted into their animal forms and curled up with one another, spreading their body heat around the small sitting room. The silver eyed girl complied with the wishes of her father and

climbed up into his lap. He opened the book to the East Asian Dragon and Hikosu marveled at the moving pictures.

"East Asian Dragons, most commonly found in China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam, are typically long, scaled, serpentine creatures with four legs. Chinese dragons have both potent and auspicious powers. Unlike the Chinese Fireball, the Celestial Chinese dragon has never been tamed. It has particular control over water, rainfall, hurricanes, and floods depending on its emotions." Severus started, petting his daughter's hair with one hand and flipping the page of the book with the other, "In the Chinese culture, the Celestial Dragon symbolizes power, strength, and good luck. It is considered immensely lucky to spot a Celestial Dragon." He continued, smiling as he caught Hikosu yawning.

"Muggles use Celestial dragons in their myths to explain magical phenomenon. There are several major dragons of Chinese mythology. The most well known are Tianlong, a Celestial dragon, Shenlong, the thunder god that controls the weather, Dilong, controller of rivers and seas, and Quinlong, guardian of the East." He continued, lowering his voice once he realized that his daughter had fallen asleep. Being as gentle as he could, Severus scooped Hikosu into his arms and carried her into their bedroom. He made sure that the book made its way back on the shelf, courtesy of Cael's drooly wolf-mouth, and transfigured his daughter's robes into her usual nightgown.

He settled his daughter down into bed and decided to stay up a little longer to grade some essays. Severus loathed the job, but it was something that was required. At least he could write snarky comments in Harry's paper and the boy wouldn't care in the least. It was a bit refreshing to be able to make fun of a student and not have them ultimately hate him in the end.

He was unaware that his beloved daughter was suffering from a nightmare simply due to the fact that she couldn't scream.

It was dark in Hikosu's dream, but the girl could hear a lot of dark and evil laughter. It was high pitched and feminine, but then another kind of laughter replaced it. It was even worse than before.

Suddenly, the silver eyed girl felt like someone was watching her. She turned around and didn't see anyone, but there was a mirror.

She cocked her head to the side in curiosity. She looked in the mirror, but the details were blurred. She continued to stare curiously in the mirror, but Hikosu couldn't help but shiver at the feeling of foreboding that was creeping up on her.

Suddenly, there was an image in the mirror. An image of Harry as an infant. There was another infant there as well and she could only guess that it was her when she was a baby. She smiled a bit before a man replaced the infant children. He looked like an older version of Harry with the same structure and messy black hair, but he didn't share the same eye color. He smiled down at her and she vaguely recognized him from somewhere.

But, just as she was beginning to relax, the man that looked like Harry morphed into Professor Quirrell. He looked down at her with his evil eyes and started to unwrap his turban, smirking all the while. When his head was finally unwrapped, she could hear someone else's laughter echoing along with his. She tried to back away, but the older man's arm snatched her arm – his arm was reaching out through the mirror.

"You will belong to the Dark Lord soon enough." He hissed, dragging her towards the mirror and finally pulling her through.

Hikosu shot up from the bed, voicelessly screaming due to her dream. Her father, Cael, and Feyen all raced into the room after sensing her mental distress. Apparently, Hikosu had very good mental shields – most likely from the Earthen magic – but they had dropped when the dream Professor Quirrell grabbed her arm.

Severus rushed to her side and opened his arms as the young girl clung to him, tears streaming down her face.

"Hikosu, love, what's the matter?" he softly said as she latched onto him. She wouldn't say anything, keeping quiet even when her animal guides shifted to their humanoid forms. Feyen started to stroke Hikosu's hair and Cael stood watch over the room, making sure that there wasn't anything there to physically harm his Animalia.

Hikosu felt like she couldn't speak. Well, she couldn't speak normally, but she felt like her mind was too sluggish and fear-filled to give a proper response. Finally, after a mental argument with himself, Severus used legilimency to read his daughter's dream. Normally,

he was severely against doing so, but he was at his wit's end. He had never witnessed his daughter acting like this from a dream before. He wanted to know what happened to he could properly console his silver eyed daughter.

After viewing the dream, and trying to calm his anger, his grasp on his daughter tightened. She had stopped crying, but Severus knew that kind of dream would haunt her for a while.

"I promise you that the Dark Lord will never get his hands on you." He said, not making a Wizard's promise as he really didn't know if he could keep the Dark Lord from his daughter. He did know that he would fight for her until his last breath left his lips.

Months passed and December finally came. Christmas was coming!

One morning in mid-December, Hogwarts woke to find itself covered in several feet of snow. Fayen was beside herself in joy – since she was a snow leopard – but Cael was less than pleased. He hated the snow. The lake froze solid and the Weasley twins were punished for bewitching several snowballs so that they followed Quirrell around, bouncing off the back of his turban. The few owls that managed to battle their way through the stormy sky to deliver mail had to be nursed back to health by Hagrid before they could fly off again.

No one could wait for the holidays to start. While the Gryffindor common room and the Great Hall had roaring fires, the drafty corridors had become icy and a bitter wind rattled the windows in the classrooms. Worst of all were Severus' classes down in the dungeons, where their breath rose in a mist before them and they kept as close as possible to their hot cauldrons.

"I do feel so sorry," said Draco Malfoy, one Potions class, "for all those people who have to stay at Hogwarts for Christmas because they're not wanted at home."

He was looking over at Harry as he spoke, completely ignoring the fact that Hikosu was sitting next to him and she was in a similar circumstance. Her father didn't have legal guardianship over her and Harry yet, so if she did want to go 'home' she would have to go back to the Dursleys.

Crabbe and Goyle chuckled. Harry, who was measuring out powdered spine of lion-fish, ignored them. Instead, he handed the powdered spine to Hikosu and she added it to the potion. Severus smirked and was inwardly proud of how the two were behaving. Malfoy had been even more unpleasant than usual since the Quidditch match, but if Severus was correct, he was developing a bit of a crush on Hikosu. If he was right, then it would die down in a couple of years...but if he was wrong, it wouldn't be pretty.

Malfoy was disgusted that the Slytherins had lost and had tried to get everyone laughing at how a wide-mouthed tree frog would be replacing Harry as Seeker next. Then he'd realized that nobody found this funny, because they were all so impressed at the way Harry had managed to stay on his bucking broomstick. So Malfoy, jealous and angry, had gone back to taunting Harry about having no proper family. He respected Hikosu to a degree since Severus was her father and his head-of-house.

It was true that Harry and Hikosu weren't going back to Privet Drive for Christmas. Why would they want to when they had Severus to spend Christmas with? Hikosu even got permission from the Headmaster for her father and her to spend it up in Gryffindor Tower. It was an unusual request, but they understood the origin of her feelings. Both Harry and Hikosu were feeling strained. They had spent every waking moment before they went to Hogwarts together and now they only saw each other during classes, when they studied, and during meals. They also saw each other occasionally when they hung out, but not snuggling together like before was taking its toll on the two of them.

This was why Hikosu asked if she and Severus could spend Christmas up in the tower. She voiced her opinion for several reasons. One, it was very cold in the dungeons despite the almost always roaring fire. Two, she didn't want to spend Christmas with one or the other – she wanted to spend Christmas with BOTH of the important men in her life. And Three, she knew that her father had spent Christmas alone for a long, long time and she wanted him to have company, despite the fact that the company would be children.

Severus had been taken aback by the offer and had wholeheartedly accepted once he realized that it would make his daughter happy. His heart warmed and he realized that the more time he spent with

the silver eyed girl the more cold hearted shell he placed around his very being started to crack and melt.

Professor McGonagall had come around the week before, making a list of students who would be staying for the holidays, and Harry and Hikosu had signed up at once. She also let Professor McGonagall know her plans. At first the older woman wasn't too keen on letting the Slytherin head-of-house in the tower, but then she realized that this may be exactly what the dark teacher needed. Harry and Hikosu didn't feel sorry for themselves at all; this would probably be the best Christmas they'd ever have. Ron and his brothers were staying, too, because Mr. and Mrs. Weasley were going to Romania to visit Charlie.

When they left the dungeons at the end of Potions, they found a large fir tree blocking the corridor ahead. Cael sat on one side of Harry while Fayen sat on the other side of Hikosu.

What is that? The silver eyed girl asked, eying the tree to see if it was some sort of hex gone awry. She wouldn't know any better since she was a first year after all. Two enormous feet sticking out at the bottom and a loud puffing sound told them that Hagrid was behind it, answering Hikosu's question.

"Hi, Hagrid, want any help?" Ron asked, shrinking a bit underneath Hikosu's glare. She still hadn't forgiven him for insulting her father.

"Nah, I'm all right, thanks Ron."

"Would you mind moving out of the way?" came Malfoy's cold drawl from behind them. "Are you trying to earn some extra money, Weasley? Hoping to be gamekeeper yourself when you leave Hogwarts, I suppose – that hut of Hagrid's must seem like a palace compared to what your family's used to."

Ron dived at Malfoy just as Severus came up the stairs.

"WEASLEY!"

Ron let go of the front of Malfoy's robes.

"He was provoked, Professor Snape," said Hagrid, sticking his huge hairy face out from behind the tree. "Malfoy was insultin' his family."



"Be that as it may, fighting is against Hogwarts rules, Hagrid," said Snape silkily as he eyed the children in front of him. He was frowning and it was almost like he was going to do something he didn't want to do.

"Five points from Gryffindor, Weasley, and be grateful it isn't more. Move along, all of you." He sighed, looking at his daughter to make sure she got the hidden meaning. Severus had explained long ago, during the first month of classes, that he was a teacher that was hated because of his bitter actions. He was bitter because his daughter had been taken away and he didn't even know where she was. He spent a long time trying to find her and finally gave up, becoming the bitter person that he was...but he was trying to come out of his shell now that his daughter was back in his life. It was hard for him to act nice, but for some reason he was required to keep up the pretenses that he hated Gryffindors. He once told her it was because all Slytherins hated all Gryffindors, but if that was true...then why did Draco Malfoy look at her sometimes with a weird expression on his face?

Papa, Malfoy was the one who started it. Why didn't you take points off of him? Hikosu questioned, knowing that only he, Harry, Fayen, and Cael could hear her. He looked down at her and a twinkle appeared in his eye.

"Wait a minute. On second thought, five points from Slytherin for provoking a fight." Severus said as well, smirking. His daughter did have a point. He looked down at her and his smirk grew as he saw his daughter's smile. She really was a good influence on him.

Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle pushed roughly past the tree, scattering needles everywhere while scowling.

"I'll get him," said Ron, grinding his teeth at Malfoy's back, "one of these days, I'll get him..."

"I hate all three of them." Harry said referring to Malfoy, Crabbe and Goyle.

"Come on, cheer up, it's nearly Christmas," said Hagrid. "Tell yeh what, come with me an' see the Great Hall, looks a treat."

So the six of them followed Hagrid and his tree off to the Great Hall, where Professor McGonagall and Professor Flitwick were busy with the Christmas decorations.

"Ah, Hagrid, the last tree – put it in the far corner, would you?"

The hall looked spectacular. Festoons of holly and mistletoe hung all around the walls, and no less than twelve towering Christmas trees stood around the room, some sparkling with tiny icicles, some glittering with hundreds of candles.

"How many days you got left until yer holidays?" Hagrid asked.

"Just one," said Hermione while Hikosu held up a finger. "And that reminds me – Harry, Ron, Hikosu, we've got half an hour before lunch, we should be in the library."

"Oh yeah, you're right," said Ron, tearing his eyes away from Professor Flitwick, who had golden bubbles blossoming out of his wand and was trailing them over the branches of the new tree. Hikosu had wandered away and was watching Professor Sprout trail special tended garlands, brightly decorated, along the doorframe of the double doors.

"The library?" said Hagrid, following them out of the hall. "Just before the holidays? Bit keen, aren't yeh?"

"Oh, we're not working," Harry told him brightly. "Ever since you mentioned Nicolas Flamel we've been trying to find out who he is."

"You what?" Hagrid looked shocked. "Listen here – I've told yeh – drop it. It's nothin' to you what that dog's guardin'."

"Hagrid, forgive me, but what harm is it for the children to research an alchemist? It could be for homework for a particular class." Fayen said after phasing into her humanoid form. She cocked her head to the side and smirked, revealing one of her fangs.

"We just want to know who Nicolas Flamel is, that's all," said Hermione.

"Unless you'd like to tell us and save us the trouble?" Harry added, feeling mischievous due to the fact that they were all ganging up on Hagrid. "We must've been through hundreds of books already and we can't find him anywhere – just give us a hint – I know I've read his name somewhere."

"I'm sayin' nothin'," said Hagrid flatly.

"Just have to find out for ourselves, then," said Ron and, after Harry had retrieved Hikosu and slipped a protective arm around her shoulders, left Hagrid looking disgruntled and hurried off to the library.

They had indeed been searching books for Flamel's name ever since Hagrid had let it slip, because how else were they going to find out what the three headed dog was guarding? The trouble was, it was very hard to know where to begin, not knowing what Flamel might have done to get himself into a book. He wasn't in Great Wizards of the Twentieth Century, or Notable Magical Names of Our time; he was missing, too, from Important Modern Magical Discoveries, and A Study of Recent Developments in Wizardry. And then, of course, there was the sheer size of the library; tens of thousands of books; thousands of shelves; hundreds of narrow rows.

Hermione took out a list of subjects and titles she had decided to search, giving another to Cael and yet another to Fayen, while Ron strode off down a row of books and started pulling them off the shelves at random. Harry and Hikosu wandered over to the restricted section. He had been wondering for a while if Flamel wasn't somewhere in there. Unfortunately, you needed a specially signed note from one of the teachers to look in any of the restricted books, and he knew he'd never get one. Perhaps he could persuade Hikosu to do that one look to Severus – you know, the one that got her anything she wanted? All she had to do was water her big silver eyes a little and Severus Snape was wrapped around her little finger.

The books in the restricted section contained powerful Dark Magic never taught at Hogwarts, and only read by older students studying advanced Defense against the Dark Arts.

"What are you looking for, boy? You too, girl?"

"Nothing," said Harry while Hikosu bit her lip and shook her head.

"You'd better get out, then. Go on – out!"

Wishing he'd been a bit quicker at thinking up some story, Harry left the library with Hikosu in tow. It took a lot of convincing, but Cael and Feyen stayed behind. Hikosu wanted to spend some time with Harry by themselves, like they used to before they found out they were magical. He, Ron, Hermione, and Hikosu had already agreed they'd better not ask Madam Pince where they could find Flamel. Cael disagreed – he was sure she'd be able to tell them, but the children didn't want to risk anyone hearing what they were up to.

Harry and Hikosu waited outside in the corridor to see if the other two had found anything, but he wasn't very hopeful. She was optimistic, but still had a bit of doubt that they would find anything worthwhile. They had been looking for two weeks, after all, but as they only had odd moments between lessons it wasn't surprising they'd found nothing. What they really needed was a nice long search without Madam Pince breathing down their necks.

Five minutes later, Ron and Hermione, plus Feyen and Cael, joined them, shaking their heads. They went off to lunch.

"You will keep looking while I'm away, won't you?" said Hermione. "And send me an owl if you find anything."

"And you could ask your parents if they know who Flamel is," said Ron. "I'd be safe to ask them."

"Very safe, as they're both dentists," said Hermione. While they had been talking, Hikosu was suddenly hit with the feeling that someone was watching them. She turned around, half expecting it to be her overprotective father, but a stroke of fear course through her when she noticed that it was Professor Quirrell that was staring at her. He was smirking – an uncharacteristic smirk – and she looked around to see if anyone else noticed, but she was short on luck.

The only thing she could do was to turn around and curl into Harry's side, not saying a word because she didn't want to worry anyone. Her nightmare came back to mind and she shuddered, but Harry only put an arm around her shoulders thinking she was cold.

Once the holidays had started, Ron and Harry were having too good a time to think much about Flamel. Severus Snape had proven to be more entertaining than previously thought. Since it was the holidays he didn't need to be so strict. He played Wizard's Chess with Ron and had deep, meaningful conversations with Harry. He read to all three of them when Hikosu asked if they were still going to read at night and the two boys proved to be as interested in the East Asian Dragons as she was.

"I wonder if my brother Charlie has ever seen one." Ron commented once, eyes wide as Severus continued to read. He had actually attracted a few of the other Gryffindors who had stayed behind as well. Severus, however, had to warn them that when school was back in session that he would be a hard ass once again.

Severus and Hikosu had their own suite behind one of the paintings in the Gryffindor common room and that was where they spend their nights, but one or two times Severus woke up to find his daughter missing. The first time that happened he nearly had a heart attack, but Cael stated, in confusion, that he felt his Mistress was near. It turns out that she and Harry had curled up on one of the couches together and had fallen asleep with a book in their laps.

The two boys, Harry and Ron, had the dormitory to themselves and the common room was far emptier than usual, so they were able to get the good armchairs by the fire. It was especially great when Severus read to them there. All four of them, plus Cael and Feyen when they weren't curled in a corner sleeping, sat by the hour eating anything they could spear on a toasting fork – bread, English muffins, marshmallows – and plotting ways of getting Malfoy expelled. Severus was being unusually lighthearted about it. It must have been because each plan was more farfetched than the last. They were fun to talk about even if they wouldn't work.

After a few days of watching Ron and Severus play wizard's chess, they decided to teach Harry. Hikosu wasn't so much interested in playing as she was in watching. This was exactly like Muggle chess except that the figures were alive, which made it a lot like directing troops in battle. Ron's set was very old and battered. Like everything else he owned, it had once belonged to someone else in his family – in this case, his grandfather. However, old chessmen weren't a drawback at all. Ron knew them so well he never had trouble getting them to do what he wanted.

Harry played with chessman Seamus Finnigan had lent him for Severus' pieces wouldn't listen to him at all. It didn't help much, the ones Seamus didn't listen to him, either. He wasn't a very good player yet and they kept shouting different bits of advice at him, which was confusing. "Don't send me there, can't you see his knight? Send him, we can afford to lose him."

On Christmas Eve, Harry went to bed looking forward to the next day for the food and the fun, but not expecting any presents at all, except for Hikosu who managed to send him one every year. When he woke early in the morning, however, the first thing he saw was a small pile of packages at the foot of his bed. His head swivvled to the door when it opened to reveal Severus and Hikosu.

"Hey, why does she get to come in here and we can't go to the girls' dorms?" Ron angrily huffed as everyone ignored him.

Merry Christmas Harry. She said, giving him a hug and a peck on the cheek. He flushed, wondering why he was suddenly feeling excited that she gave him a kiss on the cheek. He was only eleven!

"Merry Christmas." He returned, repeating the words to Severus as he conjured a chair for him to sit in. The older man put down his armload of gifts – they were most likely for Hikosu – and set aside a few for himself.

Harry picked up the top parcel. It was wrapped in thick brown paper and scrawled across it was To Harry, From Hagrid. Inside was a roughly cut wooden flute. Hagrid had obviously whittled it himself. Harry blew it – it sounded a bit like an owl.

A second, very small parcel contained a note.

We received your message and enclose your Christmas present. From Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia. Taped to the note was a fifty-pence piece.

"That's friendly," said Harry as he looked over to Hikosu's pile. She had received a small carved dragon from Hagrid and a pink ribbon from Aunt Petunia. She was staring at it with a faraway expression on her face.

"What's wrong, love?" Severus questioned as he saw his daughter just holding the ribbon.

"Aunt Petunia used to tie ribbons around her neck to hide the Animalia mark. Sometimes they were too tight and she couldn't breathe." Harry explained as Severus' expression darkened.

"Well, I'll just have to fix that." He said with a scowl, taking the ribbon from Hikosu's limp hands and setting it on fire. He levitated it in the air until it was gone and looked down at his daughters face. It now sported a smile and she giggled soundlessly.

The two of them looked at their small piles, surprised to find one package apiece from Ron's mother.

"I told her you two didn't expect any presents and – oh, no," Ron groaned, "she's made you two a Weasley sweater."

Harry had torn open the parcel to find a thick, hand-knitted sweater in emerald green and a large box of homemade fudge. Hikosu's sweater was a lovely shade of violet and she, too, had received fudge.

"Every year she makes us a sweater," said Ron, unwrapping his own, "and mine's always maroon."

"That's really nice of her," said Harry, trying the fudge, which was very tasty. His next present also contained candy – a large box of chocolate frogs from Hermione. She had sent Hikosu a book about magical creatures and Severus couldn't hold back the smile at the delight on her face.

This left only three boxes left. Harry picked up one of the smaller ones and opened it up, jaw dropping when he read the card.

"One Get Out of Detention Free Pass – Severus Snape." He read. Severus was smirking as he looked up at the Potions Master.

Are...are you serious? Hikosu wrote down on a piece of paper for Ron's benefit. Severus' smirk grew and the four of them burst out into laughter. It seemed like Ron had also received a pass, but Hikosu had received something a little different. It was a photo

album of her as a baby. It was filled to the brim with photos of her and a younger Severus.

"Lily was a bit camera happy, but it didn't mean that I wasn't happy for the pictures." Severus murmured. Hikosu looked through the pictures before looking up with a gentle smile on her face. There were pictures of Harry, Lily, James, and a few other people too.

Thank you, Papa. She wrote before getting up and hugging his neck, kissing his cheek. Harry had two gifts left, as did Hikosu, and Severus had one from Hikosu left. He had already opened his gifts from his few acquaintances.

Harry neatly tore the wrapping off of his gift from Hikosu, widening his eyes when he saw the book on Seeker tactics.

Cael went to the small village near here to get your presents. She wrote as Ron tore open his present to find a book on the Chudley Cannons. Severus was a bit more reserved opening his gift from his daughter.

Inside the little box was a pocket watch with a dragon engraved on it. He smirked, thinking it was a normal pocket watch, but when he opened it up he was shocked to see 'Home' written where the twelve was supposed to be. Along with 'Home', there was 'Dentist', 'Prison', 'Lost', 'Quidditch', 'Mortal Peril', 'Tailor', 'Bed', 'Holiday', 'Forest', 'Garden', 'Work', and, finally, 'School'. There were four pictures on little spindles in the watch – Hikosu, Harry, Cael, and Fayen. In the box there were vouchers for more names to be added to the watch.

He looked at it with wide eyes before looking back to his daughter. She was looking at him with a sheepish expression.

I got it so you wouldn't have to worry about me...his daughter said in his mind with a slight laugh. Her tone conveyed her double meaning and, for once, Harry wasn't able to hear her when she spoke. Severus looked at her, eyes softening, and as he leaned forward to hug his daughter he caught sight of Ron staring at him with wide eyes. The older man just gave a soft sigh and smiled, forgoing his usual smirk at the time of tenderness.

"Thank you, Hikosu." He said, truly grateful for something like that. Now he wouldn't worry when she was off doing



something...supposedly dangerous with Harry. It wasn't like he was expecting her to get into something dangerous...but Harry was James' son, after all.

Everyone turned to Harry so he could open his last gift – it seemed like he was supposed to go first and then Hikosu would open her last gift. Harry shrugged and picked it up, feeling it. It was very light. He unwrapped it.

Something fluid and silvery gray went slithering to the floor where it lay in gleaming folds. Ron gasped, Hikosu cocked her head to the side, and Severus frowned.

"I knew it." He muttered, but refused to say anything else of the matter.

"I've heard of those," Ron said in a hushed voice, dropping the box of Every Flavor Beans he'd gotten from Hermione. "If that's what I think it is – they're really rare, and really valuable."

"What is it?"

Harry picked the shining, silvery cloth off the floor. It was strange to the touch, like water woven into material.

"It's an invisibility cloak," said Ron, a look of awe on his face. "I'm sure it is – try it on."

Harry threw the cloak around his shoulders and Ron gave a yell.

"It is! Look down!"

Harry looked first at Hikosu's surprised expression. Her mouth was open and her eyes were wide. His mouth twitched a little and he looked down at his feet, but they were gone. He dashed to the mirror. Sure enough, his reflection looked back at him, just his head suspended in midair, his body completely invisible. He pulled the cloak over his head and his reflection vanished completely.

"There's a note!" said Ron suddenly. "A note fell out of it!"

Harry pulled the cloak off and watched as Severus picked up the letter. Written in narrow, loopy writing he recognized, but he wouldn't tell the younger ones who it was, were the following words:

Your father left this in my possession before he died. It was time it was returned to you. Use it well.

A very Merry Christmas to you.

There was no signature. Harry stared at the note after Severus had given it to him. Ron was admiring the cloak.

"I'd give anything for one of these," he said. Hikosu snorted in silent laughter.

So you'd get into more trouble, right? She wrote. Ron flushed after he read the note.

Harry felt strange. Who had sent the cloak? Had it once belonged to his father?

It was Hikosu's turn to open her last gift. It was small, about as small as the box she had given her father. Inside the box was a vial on a chain. The vial itself was about as long and thick as her pinky finger and it was filled with some sort of silvery liquid. The three males stared at the vial. Severus recognized the liquid, but he couldn't be sure. What he was thinking of was exceedingly rare...except if it came from the one source he was thinking of.

There was also a note in her box, but it was much shorter than the one given to Harry. Apparently it was from the same person who had sent Harry the invisibility cloak.

A gift to you for the troubled times ahead. Use it well.

A very Merry Christmas to you as well.

"That," Severus said slowly as he pointed to the vial on the chain, "is a bottle of Phoenix tears."

Before anyone could say or think anything else, the dormitory door was flung open and Fred and George Weasley bounded in. Harry stuffed the cloak quickly out of sight. He didn't feel like sharing it with

anyone else that wasn't originally in the room. Hikosu just shrugged and placed the magically enhanced chain around her neck, stuffing the vile underneath the shirt Severus had gotten her a while ago and the sweater she had gotten from Mrs. Weasley. He was always getting her little things, giving her the excuse that 'Harry's muggle family couldn't provide for children.' He also gave Harry things from time to time, but he wasn't Severus' main concern.

"Merry Christmas!"

"Hey look – Harry and Hikosu got a Weasley sweater, too!"

Fred and George were wearing blue sweaters, one with a large yellow F on it, the other a G.

"Harry's better than ours, though, and I don't think mum has used Hikosu's color before, has she?" said Fread, holding up Harry's sweater and picking at the silver eyed girl's. "She obviously makes more of an effort if you're not family."

"Why aren't you wearing yours, Ron?" George demanded. "Come on, get it on, they're lovely and warm."

Severus, who had not said anything at all, smirked at the scene.

"I hate maroon," Ron moaned halfheartedly as he pulled it over his head.

"You haven't got a letter on yours," George observed. "I suppose she thinks you don't forget your name. But we're not stupid – we know we're called Gred and Forge."

Fred and George were acting perfectly normal in light of the strange situation. It was almost like having the head of Slytherin in one of the Gryffindor dorms was a normal thing. The very first day they woke up to see Severus and Hikosu in the common room, it was a funny sight to see. Their mouths had been hanging open and they had been openly pointing at the Potions Master, who had promptly threatened to deduct points for their stupidity.

"What's all this noise?"

Percy Weasley stuck his head through the door, looking disapproving. He had clearly gotten halfway through unwrapping his presents as he, too, carried a lumpy sweater over his arm, which Fred seized.

"P for prefect! Get it on, Percy, come on, we're all wearing ours, even Harry and Hikosu got one."

"I – don't – want..." said Percy thickly, as the twins forced the sweater over his head, knocking his glasses askew.

"And you're not sitting with the prefects today, either," said George. "Christmas is a time for family."

They frog-marched Percy from the room, his arms pinned to his side by his sweater. Severus smirked at the entire situation, forgoing his previous thought of deducting points for the Weasley family's sheer stupidity.

For all that it was worth, both Harry and Hikosu had never had such a Christmas dinner. A hundred fat, roast turkeys; mountains of roast and boiled potatoes; platters of chipolatas; tureens of buttered peas, silver boats of thick, rich gravy and cranberry sauce – and stacks of wizard crackers every few feet along the table. Those fantastic party favors were nothing like the feeble Muggle ones the Dursleys usually bought, with their little plastic toys and their flimsy paper hats inside. Harry pulled a wizard cracker with Fred and it didn't just bang, it went off with a blast like a cannon and engulfed them all in a cloud of blue smoke, while from the inside exploded a rear admiral's hat and several live, white mice. Cael and Feyen were having a blast with those, pulling them whenever someone entered or exited the Great Hall. Up at the High Table, Dumbledore had swapped his pointed wizard's hat for a flowered bonnet, and was chuckling merrily at a joke Professor Flitwick had just read him.

Flaming Christmas puddings followed the turkey. Percy nearly broke his teeth on a silver sickle embedded in his slice. Hikosu watched with a wide smile as Hagrid got redder and redder in the face as he called for more wine, finally kissing Professor McGonagall on the cheek, who, to Harry's amazement, giggled and blushed, her top hat lopsided.

When Harry finally left the table, Hikosu following after Severus told them he would be up in the Gryffindor common room in a little while, he was laden down with a stack of things out of the crackers, including a pack of non-explodable, luminous balloons, a Grow-Your-Own-Warts kit, and his own new wizards chess set. Hikosu also had her own gryphon plush doll and a sparkling purple wrestling mask. She wasn't sure if she'd ever wear it, but it was pretty and had a butterfly on it. Fayen walked with them while Cael stayed with Severus. The white mice had disappeared and the two young ones had a nasty feeling that the mice were going to end up as Mrs. Noriss' Christmas dinner.

Harry and the Weasleys spent a happy afternoon having a furious snowball fight on the grounds. Hikosu, not feeling like joining in the fight, was building a snowman with her father and Cael. Fayen was having a grand time attacking the Weasleys with Harry – she seemed to have developed a childish streak when it came to the snow. Then, cold, wet, and gasping for breath, the large group returned to the fire in the Gryffindor common room, where Harry broke in his new chess set by losing spectacularly to Ron and listening to Severus read to them from the magical creatures book. Harry suspected he wouldn't have lost so badly if Percy hadn't tried to help him so much.

After a meal of turkey sandwiches, crumpets, trifle, and Christmas cake, everyone felt too full and sleepy to do much before bed except sit and watch Percy chase Fred and George all over Gryffindor tower because they'd stolen his prefect badge. When they almost ran into Severus when he entered the common room, he successfully hog tied them with his wand and left them in a corner of the room with socks in their mouths. All three of them.

He could have simply deducted points, but where was the fun in that?

It had been both Harry and Hikosu's best Christmas ever. Yet something had been nagging at the back of Harry's mind all day. Not until he climbed into bed was he free to think about it: the invisibility cloak and whoever had sent it. The same person had given Hikosu a vial of Phoenix tears.

Ron, full of turkey and cake and with nothing mysterious to bother him, fell asleep almost as soon as he'd drawn the curtains of his

four-poster. Harry leaned over the side of his own bed and pulled the cloak out from under it.

His father's...this had been his father's. He let the material flow over his hands, smoother than silk, light as air. Use it well, the note had said.

He had to try it, now. He slipped out of bed and wrapped the cloak around himself. Looking down at his legs, he saw only moonlight and shadows. It was a very funny feeling.

Use it well.

Suddenly, Harry felt wide-awake. The whole of Hogwarts was open to him in this cloak. Excitement flooding through him as he stood there in the dark and silence. He could go anywhere in this, anywhere, and Filch would never know.

Ron grunted in his sleep. Should Harry wake him? something held him back – his father's cloak – he felt that this time – the first time – he wanted to use it alone.

He crept out of the dormitory, down the stairs, across the common room – but he ran into a snag on the way. The portrait to the place where Severus and Hikosu usually slept was open and the girl was currently sitting on the couch with a worried expression on her face. Cael and Feyen were nowhere in sight and neither was Severus. Where were they? Harry began to rethink his decision about going alone if Hikosu was going to be here by herself. The emerald eyed boy whipped off his cloak and the silver eyed girl jumped.

Harry? What are you doing up? She questioned softly, eyes wide.

"The better question is 'what are you doing up?'" Harry retorted just as softly.

Papa had to do night rounds – all of the teachers do them to see that students aren't out of bed. She replied, Cael and Feyen went with him...because I didn't want anything to happen to him. she continued, eyes downcast. Harry felt bad that she was worrying about Severus so he decided that they could go to the library together.

"I was going to go to the restricted section of the library tonight...with this." He said, holding up the cloak, "I think it's big enough for two people." He continued as an afterthought. Hikosu smiled up at him, daring to be dangerous just for one night. She was getting a little frustrated with how her father, Cael, and Feyen were becoming overprotective.

The two of them stood and wrapped the invisibility cloak around them. Like Harry thought, it was big enough for the two of them. After they had gotten the cloak situated around them, they climbed through the portrait hole.

"Who's there?" squawked the Fat Lady. Harry said nothing. They walked quickly down the corridor. The two of them headed towards the library – they would be able to read as long as they liked, as long as it took to find out who Flamel was. They set off, drawing the invisibility cloak tight around them as they walked.

The library was pitch-black and very eerie. Harry lit a lamp to see their way along the rows of books, Hikosu right behind him as she clung to his arm. The lamp looked as if it was floating along in midair, and even though Harry could feel his arm supporting it, the sight gave him the creeps.

The Restricted Section was right at the back of the library. Stepping carefully over the rope that separated these books from the rest of the library, he held up his lamp to read the titles.

They didn't tell the two children much. Their peeling, faded gold letters spelled words in languages Harry and Hikosu couldn't understand. Some had no title at all. One book had a dark stain on it that looked horribly like blood. The hairs on the back of Harry's neck prickled and Hikosu's stomach started to ache with the tension in the air. Maybe they were imagining it, maybe not, but they thought a faint whispering was coming from the books, as though they knew people were there that shouldn't be.

They had to start somewhere. Setting the lamp down carefully on the floor, he looked along the bottom shelf for an interesting looking book. A large black and silver volume caught his eye. He pulled it out with difficulty, because it was very heavy, and, balancing it on his knee, let it fall open. Hikosu looked over his shoulder, standing on the tips of her toes with a curious expression on her face.

A piercing, bloodcurdling shriek split the silence – the book was screaming! Hikosu stumbled back against a table, a soundless scream erupting from her lips. Harry snapped the book shut, but the shriek went on and on, one high, unbroken, earsplitting note. He stumbled backward and knocked over his lamp, which went out at once. Panicking, he heard footsteps coming down the corridor outside – stuffing the shrieking book back on the shelf, he ran for it. He grabbed Hikosu's hand and threw the cloak back on before they passed Filch in the doorway; Filch's pale, wild eyes looked straight through them, and Harry helped Hikosu slip under Filch's outstretched arm and streak off up the corridor, the book's shrieks still ringing in their ears.

The two of them came to a sudden halt in front of a tall suit of armor. He had been so busy getting away from the library and protecting Hikosu – he didn't want to think about what Severus and the two animal guides would do to him if his silver eyed best friend had gotten detention – he hadn't paid attention to where they were going. Perhaps because it was dark, but he didn't recognize where he was at all.

Harry, where are we? Hikosu asked, deflating the emerald eyed boy a bit. That had ruined his idea of asking her if she knew where they were. There was a suit of armor near the kitchens, he knew, but they must be five floors above there.

"You asked me to come directly to you, Professor, if anyone was wandering around at night, and somebody's been in the library – Restricted Section."

Harry felt the blood drain out of his face. Wherever they were, Filch must know a shortcut, because his soft, greasy voice was getting nearer, and to his horror, it was Severus who replied, "The Restricted Section? Well, they can't be far, we'll catch them."

If Severus was there, Fayen and Cael must have been there as well. They could smell the two young ones...and they would be in trouble for sure.

Harry stood rooted to the spot as Filch and Snape came around the corner ahead. They couldn't see the two children, of course, but it was a narrow corridor and if they came much nearer they knock



right into the two children. The cloak didn't stop them from being solid.

Much to their confusion, Cael and Feyen were not with Severus. They didn't have much time to dwell on it after all since Filch answered their question.

"Genius plan, Professor, having the two animal guides roam one part of the castle while you and I have another part. Makes it much easier to catch troublemakers." He said. Harry felt a sort of immense relief at the situation, but Hikosu's nerves had skyrocketed. What if Quirrell tried to hurt her father?

Harry backed away as quietly as he could, taking hold of his female friend's elbow and guiding her with him. A door stood ajar to their left. It was their only hope. The two of them squeezed through it, holding their breath, trying not to move it, and to his relief the two of them managed to get inside the room without their noticing anything. They walked straight past, and Harry leaned against the wall with Hikosu pressed up against his chest. They were breathing deeply, listening to their footsteps dying away. That had been close, very close. It was a few seconds before the two of them noticed anything about the room they had hidden in.

I don't like hiding from Papa, Harry. It almost makes me wish we had revealed ourselves to him, but then we'd get in trouble. Hikosu said in a shaky breath, Just make sure we get back before he does? She questioned him and he nodded. Severus didn't have early morning classes the next day – because it was still Christmas break, of course - so he would be back late.

The room they were in looked like an unused classroom. The dark shapes of desks and chairs were piled against the walls, and there was an upturned wastepaper basket – but propped against the wall facing them was something that didn't look as if it belonged there, something that looked as if someone had just put it there to keep it out of the way.

Hikosu took in a sharp breath, recognizing the mirror as the one from her dream.

Harry... she whispered, fear in her gaze. Harry took the cloak from their small bodies and turned towards her, concern in his eyes.

"What is it, Hikosu?" he said, worried about his friend. He had never seen her so scared since the time Dudley threatened to rip the wing off of a bird. She had understood the bird's screams.

I had a dream about this mirror... she whispered again, Or more like a nightmare, really. She continued with a sigh. It was really a magnificent mirror, as high as the ceiling, with an ornate gold frame, standing on two clawed feet. There was an inscription carved around the top: Erised stra ehru oyt ube cafru oyt on wohsi.

"Don't worry. I don't think that a mirror could really be that bad." He said, not really believing his words. Ever since he had found out he was a Wizard, Harry had been cautious about a lot of things in his life. The mirror could easily be evil. He stepped in front of the mirror, having to clap his hands to his mouth to stop himself from screaming. He whirled around. His heart was pounding far more furiously when the book had screamed – for he had seen not only himself in the mirror, but a whole crowd of people standing right behind him, including Severus and Hikosu.

Harry, what's wrong? Said silver eyed girl question, her unease from the mirror replaced by surprise from Harry's reaction.

"There were...there were people in the mirror." He answered in a daze. But the room was empty save for Hikosu.

Breathing very fast, he turned slowly back to the mirror. There he was, reflected in it, white and scared-looking, and there, reflected behind him, were at least ten others, Hikosu, and Severus. Harry looked over his shoulder – but still, no one was there besides the silver eyed girl. Or were they all invisible, only seen by the mirror? Was he in fact in a room full of invisible and intangible people, only reflected in the mirror?

He looked in the mirror again. A woman standing right behind his reflection was smiling at him and waving. Hikosu stood next to him with a bright smile on her face, hand holding his and fingers laced. He reached out a hand and felt the air behind him. if she were really there, he'd touch her, their reflections were so close together, but he felt only air – she and the other existed only in the mirror...but that doesn't explain why Hikosu was in both the mirror and behind him.

And what about Severus? He was alive, but he was in the mirror as well. It was just so confusing.

He looked back at the woman in the mirror. She was a very pretty woman. She had dark red hair and her eyes – her eyes are just like mine, Harry thought, edging a little closer to the glass. Bright green – exactly the same shape, but then he noticed that she was crying; smiling, but crying at the same time. The tall, thin, black-haired man standing next to her put his arm around her. He wore glasses, and his hair was very untidy. It stuck up at the back, just as Harry's did.

Harry was so close to the mirror now that his nose was nearly touching that of his reflection.

Harry, what is it? What do you see? Hikosu was starting to panic a little and she let out a soundless squeak when Harry whirled around and grabbed her shoulders. He jerked her in front of the mirror, where he was once standing. She let out another soundless squeak when she realized that there were more people in the picture than she realized.

"No, what do you see?" he questioned her, trying to figure out what was wrong with the mirror.

I see...me...and you...but we're older. We must be seventh years or close to it...and I have more animal guides. A lot more... Hikosu murmured. We're holding hands...and Papa is there...and so is your dad, I would guess that's who he is.

She trailed off as she stared at the picture. What she didn't tell Harry was that she was wearing an engagement ring. Along with Feyen and Cael, who were in animal forms, there was a young unicorn, a dragonfly on Feyen's head, a fennec fox, and a golden eagle. There was also a very large Asian dragon that curled around all of them. Seven animal guides in all.

"But that's not what I saw..." Harry said, "I saw my family and you were there...and so was Professor Snape."

The two of them stood there before Hikosu moved so that Harry could see himself in the mirror again. Those people and his parents appeared once again and he could help but whisper.

"Mom? Dad?" he breathed. They just looked at him, smiling. And slowly, Harry looked into the faces of the other people in the mirror, and saw other pairs of green eyes like his, other noses like his, even a little old man who looked as though he had Harry's knobby knees – Harry was looking at his family, for the first time in his life.

The Potters smiled and waved at Harry and he stared hungrily back at them, his hands pressed flat against the glass as though he was hoping to fall right through it and reach them. A smile reached his lips when he felt Hikosu place her hand on his shoulder, but he had a powerful kind of ache inside him, half joy, half terrible sadness.

How long the two of them stood there, he didn't know. The reflections did not fade and he looked and looked until a distant noise brought him back to his senses. The two of them couldn't stay there – he had to get Hikosu back to bed before Severus and the two animal guides got back to the common room. Harry tore his eyes away from his mother's face, whispered, "I'll come back," before throwing the invisibility cloak over both of their frames, guiding Hikosu from the room. They decided to keep the mirror their little secret for the time being.

The snow still hadn't melted the next morning. Harry and Hikosu had gotten back before Severus and the two animal guides, fortunately, but they were extremely tired the next day.

"Want to play chess, Harry?" said Ron.

"No."

"Why don't we go down and visit Hagrid?"

"No...you go..."

Ron gave up talking to him so Hikosu decided to take charge.

I know what you're thinking about, Harry, that mirror. That strange and scary mirror. She said, shuddering at the thought of her nightmare, Don't go back tonight. She continued, worry evident in her gaze.

"Why not?"

I have a bad feeling about it – and we barely got away last time. Filch, Papa, and Mrs. Norris are wandering around – and Feyen and Cael are, too! What if they walk into you? What if Cael or Feyen smell you? What if you knock something over? She babbled, silver eyes wide and voice worried.

"You sound like Hermione."

I'm serious, Harry, don't go.

But Harry only had one thought in his head, which was to get back in front of that mirror. Hikosu saw that she couldn't dissuade him from going.

Alright, she sighed, but I'm going with you.

The third night the two of them snuck out they found their way more quickly than before. He was walking so fast, and almost dragging Hikosu with him, and he knew that he was making more noise than was wise, but the two didn't meet anyone.

And there were his mother and father smiling at him again, and one of his grandfathers nodding happily. Severus was smiling down at him, hand on Hikosu's shoulder. And her hand was still entwined in his as she planted a kiss on his cheek. Harry felt his cheeks blush, but he couldn't look away. Harry sank down to sit on the floor in front of the mirror. Hikosu sat behind him with her chin over his shoulder, seeing her own experience in the mirror. There was nothing to stop him from staying there all night with his family. Nothing at all.

Except...

"So...back again, Harry? Hikosu?"

Harry felt as though his insides had turned to ice. He looked behind him, over Hikosu's shoulder. Sitting on one of the desks by the wall was none other than Albus Dumbledore. Harry must have walked straight past him, so desperate to get to the mirror he hadn't noticed him.

"I...I didn't see you, sir."

"Strange how nearsighted being invisible can make you," said Dumbledore, and Harry was relieved to see that he was smiling.

"So," said Dumbledore, slipping off the desk to sit on the floor with Harry and Hikosu, "the two of you, like hundreds before you, have discovered the delights of the Mirror of Erised."

"I didn't know it was called that, sir."

"But I expect you've realized by now what it does." He looked between the two children.

"It...well...it shows me my family..."

"And it showed Hikosu her animal guides – all of them – with you two as seventh years. With your father and her father." Hikosu blushed and looked away from the two wizards.

"How did you know...?"

"I don't need a cloak to become invisible, Harry." Said Dumbledore gently. "Now, can you think what the Mirror of Erised shows us all?"

Harry and Hikosu shook their heads.

"Let me explain. The happiest man on earth would be able to use the Mirror of Erised like a normal mirror, that is, he would look into it and see himself exactly as he is. Does that help?"

Harry thought. Then he said slowly, "It shows us what we want...whatever we want..."

"Yes and no," said Dumbledore quietly. "It shows us nothing more or less than the deepest, most desperate desire of our hearts. You, who have never known your family, see them standing around you. Hikosu, having no known family, sees herself surrounded by her animal guides – even the ones who might or might not exist – and her father. She sees you as her family and your father makes you happy – apparently she wants you to be happy as well since there is a chance he may be alive. However, this mirror will give us neither knowledge nor truth. Men have wasted away before it, entranced by what they have seen, or been driven mad, not knowing if what it shows is real or even possible.

"The mirror will be moved to a new home tomorrow, Harry, Hikosu, and I ask that you two not go looking for it again. If you ever do run across it, you will now be repared. It does not do to dwell on dreams and forget to live, remember that. Now, why don't you put that admirable cloak back on and get off to bed?"

Harry stood up, pulling Hikosu up gently behind him. Her eyes were drooping due to the lack of sleep for three nights.

"Sir...Professor Dumbledore? Can I ask you something?"

"Obviously, you've just done so," Dumbledore smiled. "You may ask me one more thing, however."

"What do you see when you look in the mirror?"

"I? I see myself holding a pair of thick. Woolen socks." And with that Hikosu let out a soundless giggle. Harry, however, stared.

"One can never have enough socks," said Dumbledore. "Another Christmas has come and gone and I didn't get a single pair. People will insist on giving me books."

It was only when he was back in bed that it struck Harry that Dumbledore might not have been quite truthful. But, then, he thought, as he shoved Scabbers off his pillow, it had been quite a personal question.

But why did he feel so disappointed when Dumbledore told him that Hikosu saw him as family?

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